POPULAR RELIGION IN DUDLEY AND THE GORNALS
c.1914-1965

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Signature.....

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Referencing Conventions

Abbreviations, for locations of records, used in footnotes of the text:

BAD: *Blocksidge Almanac of Dudley*
BCB: *Black Country Bugle*
DH: *Dudley Herald*
GSFCC: Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council
LOHA: Lancaster University Oral History Archive.
M-O A: Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex

Abbreviations, for oral interviews, used in footnotes of the text and in the bibliography:
RPMSI, G: Interviews held by the author with Gornal inhabitants
RPMSI, D: Interviews held by the author with Dudley inhabitants
WUI, G: Interviews held by students or staff of the University of Wolverhampton with Gornal inhabitants
WUI, D: Interviews held by students or staff of the University of Wolverhampton with Dudley inhabitants

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Abstract

This thesis examines the nature and extent of popular religious belief, practice and experience in the Black Country town of Dudley and the nearby industrial villages of Upper Gornal, Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood, c.1914 to c.1965. A sample of 60 interviewees, producing around 150 recorded hours and representing a broad spectrum of involvement in associational religion, from lifelong attenders to those who have rarely attended church as adults, forms the main body of evidence. This is supplemented by local histories, newspapers and church and chapel records. Samples of evidence from oral history and the Mass-Observation archives provide comparative material from other localities.

The study provides an empirical basis with which to review the secularisation thesis, contribute to the debate on working-class religion during the twentieth century and further understanding of the nature of popular religion, both within and beyond the parameters of religious institutions. It explores the extent to which, and ways in which, religious modes of thought continued to characterise significant aspects of working-class life throughout much of the twentieth century and the ways in which orthodox Christian beliefs and practices combined with folk traditions and superstitions.

The thesis concludes with an analysis of the decline of popular religious belief and practice during the years following the Second World War, suggesting some of the main determinants of the changes which are identified. Throughout the thesis, the ways in which the differing social and cultural contexts of the town of Dudley and the Gornal villages influenced the nature and extent of popular religious belief and practice (and their decline) are identified and assessed.

Contents

Chapter 1

Secularisation and Popular Religion

The twentieth century, as presented in an influential historiographical trend, is the age of 'decline and fall' for the English churches.[1] It is the century which follows that during which the 'secularization of the European mind' took place.[2] Cursed (or blessed) with the inheritance of the radical social changes resulting from the unprecedented industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century was, depending on your point of view, doomed to irreligious moral decline, or the harbinger of a bright new dawn of intellectual liberation and moral autonomy. Either way, religious belief and practice, as traditionally understood, was not to play a major part, at least for the masses.

The twentieth century, to paraphrase the argument, thus stands in sharp contrast with a pre-industrial age of faith (or indoctrination). During the nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation - jointly denoted in the more contentious concept of modernisation - had two major effects on religion, first in terms of practice and second in terms of belief. First, religious practice was undermined by the disruption of a socially integrated rural society and the development of class segregation both in the workplace and in the community. The rural economy had sustained personal vertical relations based on patronage and deference, a system within which the Church had a central role, all (or nearly all) being brought within its ambit, a movement from relative Anglican monopoly to denominational pluralism. If the churches and chapels in the growing towns and cities - and particularly the Methodist chapels - apparently benefited from the existence of new working-class communities, this was merely a transitional stage, a bulwark against social anomie, ultimately destined to pass.

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[1] E.R. Wickham, 'Church and People in the Years of "Decline and Fall", 1900 to the Present', in L. Schneider (ed.), *Religion, Culture and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Religion* (1964), pp. 402-10.

[2] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975).

The brave new world of the urban-industrial economy, in the second strand of the argument, was also the context within which the credibility - even necessity - of religious belief suffered an accelerating process of attrition. Increasingly extending not only his knowledge but also his control over his environment, man was less vulnerable to the vagaries of nature and hence less prone to seek divine assistance. If science provided the basis for the argument for design in the seventeenth century, the application of science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries underpinned the argument for decline.

It is, to a large extent, upon the basis of the observable and measurable decline in active allegiance to the churches that secularisation theories have been developed. Such theories, discussed below, have negotiated various explanatory paths between the extremes of materialism and intellectualism, the religious alienation of the masses in modern society and the intellectual crisis of faith.

From the perspective of the late twentieth century, the statistics of church decline are unmistakable and undeniable, although some of the fluctuations in the downward curve - particularly during the 1950s - remain difficult to explain and constitute a warning against simplistic models of unilinear secularisation. It is considerably less clear that rational utilitarian modes of thought have been apotheosised, and religious belief atrophied, in an Age of Mass Enlightenment. Even at the end of the century, when only 12.6% of the population of England claims active membership of a Christian church, three out of five claim still to believe in a personal God and a further 13% believe in a 'higher power'.[3] The work of Alister Hardy and David Hay some twenty years ago revealed that more than one in three in a survey of nearly two thousand people claimed to have had some sort of experience of the transcendent or numinous, whilst investigations of near-death experiences continue to fascinate with their hint

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[3] Peter Brierley (ed.) *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99 No. 1* (1997), tables 2.7.2 and 5.13.

of the possibility of a life beyond the grave.[4] As Jostein Gaarder noted at the end of *Sophie's World*, the shelves of bookshops are lined with books on the occult, mysticism and the New Age, and a recent survey of such publications listed in *Books in Print* revealed a dramatic rise from 131 in 1965 to 2858 in 1994.[5] Moreover, the appeal of the supernatural realm is manifest - and commercially encouraged - in the continued popularity of astrology, whilst mass obeisance to Lady Luck is made on a weekly (now twice weekly) basis in the belief that it just 'might be you'.

The widespread phenomenon of private religious belief, regularly noted by various opinion polls in the contemporary context, demands a reassessment of the recent history of religion in a framework other than that of institutional religion. The concept of 'popular religion' has been, at least in part, a response to the perceived methodological limitations in older approaches to the sociology of religion and to the perception that religious history which confines itself to the fortunes of the churches may be missing significant strands of religious belief and practice.

It is to the debate arising from this perception which the following study seeks to contribute. The opening chapter provides an analysis of the main strands of the secularisation debate, reviews the developments in the historiography of nineteenth- and twentieth-century religion in England and outlines the methodological approach adopted as the vehicle for investigating popular religion in the localities described in chapter 2.

Secularisation Theories

The origins of many of the main strands of debate incorporated within secularisation theories lie in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought. Common to the positivism of Comte, the

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[4] Alister Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 126-28. For near-death experiences see, for example, Raymond Moody, *Life after Life* (Atlanta, 1975); Kenneth Ring, *Heading Toward Omega* (New York, 1980) and Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Truth in the Light: An Investigation of Over 300 Near Death Experiences* (1995).

rationalism of Spencer, Tylor and Frazer and the materialism of Marx was an evolutionary assumption, more or less explicit, which destined religion to intellectual, cultural and social obsolescence.[6] For such thinkers, the demise of religion was a process to be welcomed, a liberation from intellectual and social shackles, the product of the modern world's intellectual maturity or of economic change transforming religious into secular hopes.

Max Weber was also concerned with the transformation from pre-modern to modern modes of thought, but identified factors intrinsic to the Protestant religion, rather than extrinsic social, economic or intellectual factors, as the important long-term motors of change. In particular, Protestantism was regarded as the midwife of rationalism, demystifying the world by rationalising the supernatural, leading to the 'disenchantment' of the modern western world.[7] Unlike many positivist and rationalist thinkers, Weber did not trumpet the arrival of the modern world as the destination of a journey from primitiveness to sophistication, but regarded it as the inevitable result of an evolutionary process.

Emile Durkheim was still less sanguine about the consequences of the diminishing role of religion in the modern world, arguing that religion functioned to provide social cohesion and concluding that the decline of the sacred presented the danger of an atomised society. Nonetheless, he shared the conviction that religion was doomed to modern decline, even if its socially integrative function might be assumed by secular forces. [8]

The early founding fathers of the sociology of religion have had a profound influence on subsequent thinkers, producing divergent schools of thought. Broadly, these are grouped according to the different definitions of religion adopted. Those influenced by Durkheim have

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[5] Stuart Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (Oxford, 1997).

[6] For a brief but useful summary of the thinking of Comte, Spencer, Tylor and Frazer, see Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion* (1995), pp. 21-7; E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (1871); J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged edn. (1987); K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (Moscow, 1957).

[7] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) [first published 1904]; *Idem*, *The Sociology of Religion* (1965).

considered religion in terms of its social or psychological functions. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown argued that religion was vital to the maintenance of society, religious ritual in particular providing symbolic expressions of shared sentiments which underpin social order.[9] For Bronislaw Malinowski religion was rooted not in society itself, but in the need for a stable society to find answers to the emotional needs of individuals and, in particular, a positive response to death. Religion thus functioned to sacralize crises in human life.[10] Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski have, in turn, been followed by others in similar intellectual traditions. Talcott Parsons emphasised the role of religion in providing meaning, particularly for death, pain and injustice within modern industrial society.[11] Kingsley Davis emphasised the importance of psychological factors inherent to human nature in the generation of religion, which in turn underpins social values and social stability.[12]

Others scholars, drawing on the sociological functionalism of Durkheim, have challenged the very foundations upon which secularisation theories rest, that is to say that 'religious thinking' is fundamentally supernaturalist. They have posited a theory in which 'the problem of individual existence in society is a "religious" problem' and which assumes the universal presence of 'phenomena underlying religious institutions [...] performing analogous functions in the relation of the individual and the social order'.[13] For Thomas Luckmann, it is the attempt of the individual to transcend his/her biological nature through the search for some ultimate concern that is intrinsically religious, and the monotheistic faiths can be bracketed with Marxism in so far as they are (or were), in different societies, functionally analogous. In contemporary western society, according to Luckmann, institutional religion, the relevance of

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[8] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (1976), first published 1915.

[9] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'Religion and Society', in Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952).

[10] B. Malinowski, *The Foundation of Faith and Morals* (1936).

[11] T. Parsons, 'Christianity and Modern Industrial Society', in E.A. Tiryakin (ed.), *Sociological Theory, Values and Sociocultural Change* (New York, 1963).

[12] K. Davis, *Human Society* (New York, 1949).

which to individual experience appears increasingly selective, must compete pluralistically in an ideological market place. Institutional segmentation and the anonymity of modern work conditions have moved the formation of personality from the public into the private sphere, wherein a sense of autonomy creates a consumer orientation and the subjective choice of the individual extends to ultimate meanings. Luckmann finally identifies the social relations of the private sphere itself - home, family, sexuality - as the predominant locus of ultimate meaning for the autonomous private consumer.[14] Peter Berger has not gone quite as far as Luckmann, rejecting the idea that any system of ultimate meaning was thereby religious but, like Luckmann, emphasised the idea that religion provides ultimate meanings, a symbolic universe essential to fend off the otherwise inevitable consciousness of chaos.[15]

To the extent that functionalist sociologists argue for a widening of the definition of religion beyond institutional parameters, their approach is to be welcomed. It is, however, largely unamenable to empirical demonstration. In so far as Christianity has taken institutional form and consequently been given systematic elaboration in the public sphere, it is clear that it has been a vehicle for addressing questions of ultimate significance. It has not been possible to demonstrate that the privatised, or 'invisible', forms of religion, which Luckmann argues to be characteristic of modern western society, have a comparable orientation to questions of ultimate significance. Indeed, in so far as extra-institutional religiosity becomes visible (in surveys, for example) it only does so by virtue of containing elements (belief in God, prayer, etc.) of, or constituting a residue of, official religion.[16] In the functionalist approach the religious sphere

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[13] Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (1967), pp.12, 43.

[14] Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*, pp.84-99.

[15] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, 1969).

[16] For observations on this problem, see C.J.M. Donders, 'Some Psychological Remarks on Official and Popular Religion', in Vrijhof and Waardenburg (eds.), *Official and Popular Religion*, pp.294-322. If the problem is great for sociologists attempting to demonstrate the 'religious' nature of privatised value systems in *contemporary* western society, it is even greater for the historian to demonstrate in a longitudinal study: whilst depth interviewing may reveal the previously unarticulated values of the individual in the present, any such values which remained unarticulated and without explicit recognition and categorisation as such by the individual actor in the past are

tends to become subsumed within a general sociology of culture and the understanding of the religious subject concerning the content and form of his/her religious belief becomes irrelevant.[17] Within such a formulation, there is no place for any exploration of the meanings given by religious people to their religious beliefs, experiences and practices. It must be the task of the social and cultural historian to consider the ways in which the *content* of religious belief and practice inflected personal experiences of and perspectives on life, as well as considering the social functions of religion. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has observed in relation to Javanese religion, 'the ultimate religious experience taken *subjectively* is also the ultimate religious truth taken *objectively*, [and] an empirical analysis of inward perception yields at the same time a metaphysical analysis of outward reality'.[18] That is to say, personalised religious truths are projected by the believer on to outward reality, so that for him/her the spiritual truths have ontological priority over the external material world which in turn is perceived and interpreted within a religious framework. By contrast, the approach advocated by Luckmann results in the adoption of a definition of religion which would scarcely be recognised as such by any outside the sociological fraternity, and would surely be acknowledged by very few of those considering themselves to be 'religious'. This line of criticism is, perhaps, to fall into the 'language of sources' trap identified by Glasner: definitions are rooted in historical

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likely to remain inaccessible to memory and hence to historians. Only, one suspects, when such values were consciously opposed to the values of institutional religion and hence given shape as an alternative value system or else consciously organised around socially articulated value systems, can the historian expect to identify a relationship between institutional religion and private value-systems (whether supernaturalist or naturalist, idealist or materialist) which can justify describing the latter as 'religion'. That the potential of oral history to illuminate aspects of past experience is intimately tied not only to the personal importance of the issue under discussion, but also to its social importance and its expression in some form of social activity has been explicitly recognised by several exponents of the methodology: see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2n edn. (Oxford, 1988), pp.111-113; and Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History* (1987), p.118. For an attempt to provide some empirical basis to the notion of privatised religions, see Richard Machalek and Michael Martin, '"Invisible" Religions: Some Preliminary Evidence', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 15, no. 4 (1976), pp. 311-21.

[17] For brief comments on this problem, see P. Worsley, 'Religion as Category' in Roland Robertson (ed.), *Sociology of Religion: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 221-36 (p. 232).

[18] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1975), p. 135.

conventional usage and limited thereby.[19] The historian may respond, however, that since religion has historically rooted meanings one must, if one is to understand the meanings and roles ascribed to 'religion' in a given place and time, avoid definitions which are a-historical abstractions and hence intra-culturally counter-intuitive.[20] The functionalist concentration on the function rather than the content and form of religious belief has also, as Geertz has argued, resulted in a failure adequately to explain social change, due to the emphasis on functional at the cost of dysfunctional aspects of social usages and customs and a resultant a-historical and essentially conservative image of society in stable equilibrium.[21]

The debate about the validity of secularisation theories has, to a certain extent, been shaped by what is meant by 'religion'. As Bryan Wilson has observed, those who adopt a functionalist definition are less likely to accept the thrust of the secularisation thesis, emphasising structural continuity as traditional religious forms are transformed into modern ones.[22] Other sociologists have adopted more overtly substantive definitions of religion, emphasising change rather than continuity. Wallis and Bruce identified three aspects of secularisation: social differentiation, societalization and rationalisation. The first involves both institutional functional specialisation and social differentiation due to economic diversity and consequent class formation, with the result that a single moral universe is no longer plausible. Societalisation denotes the movement away from a local towards a broader societal orbit for life experiences with the weakening of tight-knit and small-scale communities, replaced by large bureaucracies and impersonal anonymous residential patterns, with the result that religion, which prospers in the environment of the traditional community, becomes privatised and shorn of objective authority. Rationalisation consists in the increasing tendency to treat the world pragmatically employing 'technically efficient means of securing this-worldly ends',

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19 Peter E. Glasner, *The Sociology of Secularisation: A critique of a concept* (1977), pp. 4-5.

20 Here, I follow the position taken by M.E. Spiro cited in Glasner, *The Sociology of Secularisation*, p. 6.

21 Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p.143.

22 B. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford, 1982).

particularly through technology which provides the means to control the environment and reduce uncertainty.[23] These three aspects of secularisation recur in varying combinations in the literature on the subject.

Some, in the Weberian tradition, identified the rise of rationalism as the cause of secularisation, though rationalism in turn was sometimes considered to be the product of socio-economic developments. Ferdinand Tönnies outlined the process in terms of a transition from community to society, or *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, with self-interest and utilitarian social relations replacing shared communal assumptions about the intrinsic value of actions, religion constituting an important part of the latter and thus losing its social significance in this transition.[24]

The criteria by which the decline in the social significance of religion is assessed remain contentious. For want of substantial evidence on other matters of religious belief and practice, church participation has been treated as a measure of the religiosity of a given population and declining membership (Nonconformist) or Easter communion (Anglican) figures have been cited as evidence of a widespread loss of religious faith.[25] Such evidence of numerical decline is adduced to lend weight to the thesis of secularisation, by which one is to understand 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social

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23 Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, 'Secularization: The Orthodox Model', in Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 8-30 (p. 14).

24 F. Tönnies, *Community and Society* (Michigan, 1957).

25 The main statistically-based study is Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Church-Goers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977). The broad outline of numerical decline identified by Currie *et al.* is incontrovertible, though the focus on the twentieth century - and particularly the First World War - as the period in which decline set in has been challenged by Robin Gill, who argues that competitive building by all Christian denominations and the consequent increasingly thinly spread pool of potential worshippers and lingering building debts were rendering the British churches in both town and countryside unattractive to potential worshippers from the middle of the nineteenth century. Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (1993). Gill (pp. 16-29) also provides a number of pertinent criticisms of the diachronic use of membership and Easter communion figures in the light of discernible shifts in institutional emphases and popular practice relating to these aspects of religiosity.

significance'.[26] A clear distinction, however, needs to be drawn in accounts which adopt substantive definitions of religion between the use of the concept of secularisation to denote, on the one hand, the declining social significance of religious institutions both in terms of their roles and socio-cultural influence and of their numerical support and, on the other hand, the replacement of supernaturalist private beliefs and ritualistic practices with secular rationalism and utilitarian conduct. The secularisation thesis of which the sociologist Bryan Wilson has been the main exponent has tended to emphasise the role of institutionalised religion to the exclusion of any extended consideration of private beliefs which may, or may not, find expression through institutional form:

> Religious institutions, organisations, affiliations and practices, and institutionalised belief-systems have been of more social consequence in all societies than are the contemporary private beliefs of individuals isolated by an interview schedule.[27]

However, Wilson's thesis places the twentieth century at the end of a Weberian process of disenchantment: rationalism, the child of Protestantism, has cut itself free of religion and modern man no longer has any great need for recourse to the supernatural. Religious institutions survive only in an etiolated form as vehicles for the satisfaction of a taste for ceremonial, or in the form of sects providing a centre of gravity for the otherwise socially marginalised. Thus the link between secularism (the replacement of the church as an institution with major social functions) and secularisation (which includes the shrinkage in the incidence of religious thinking and practice) is implied but not empirically demonstrated.

It is scarcely surprising, given such fundamental differences in the definition of religion as those which distinguish functional and substantive definitions, that the concept of secularisation has been plagued by a variety of different constructions. In the late 1970s, Peter Glasner provided a thorough critique of the concept, categorising the different approaches according to the definitions of religion which they implied: institutional (adherence to churches),

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[26] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 14.

normative (significance of religion in establishment of social norms) or cognitive (significance of religion for the individual *Weltanschauung*).[28] Glasner concluded that the usage of the concept of secularisation constitutes a 'social myth' in so far as it has been used i) in an ideological manner as part of both pro- and anti-religious positions (equated with the ills of modern society or progress and modernisation); and ii) in a manner which extends some original argument to the point of distortion, generalising from data narrowly limited in time and space. Glasner found all accounts wanting in their failure to provide a sociological theory which will define and explain secularisation outside the particularities of an empirical context. However, he seems to conclude that this is an impossible task, recommending instead what appears to be a minimal concept of secularisation. Distinguishing between religion, defined in real and substantive, as opposed to nominal and functional terms, and 'the religious', defined rather nebulously as 'a specific form of social relationship found within the undifferentiated group context' involving reciprocal faith and (it would appear) unmediated by any utilitarian purposes,[29] Glasner recommends that sociologists leave the field of the 'religious' (since this, by Glasner's definition, is simply either present or absent) and focus purely on 'religion', defined in the exclusive substantive rather than functional sense. Thus, curiously, Glasner returns to what appears to be the historicist position: careful empirical explorations of the declining influence of institutionally defined religion in fairly narrowly defined contexts.

Historians and the Secularisation Thesis

The sociologist, Kenneth Thompson, has distinguished between two main groupings of theories of secularisation: those which trace 'social morphological' changes (factors relating to population distribution and interaction) and those which trace the course of institutional

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[27] Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, pp. 18-19.
[28] Peter E. Glasner, *The Sociology of Secularisation: A critique of a concept* (1977).
[29] Glasner, *Sociology of Secularisation*, p. 109.

differentiation.[30] The distinction applies equally to historical accounts of religion in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Social morphological changes provided the fundamental explanatory framework for historical accounts from the 1950s, whilst the institutional differentiation model provided a powerful tool for revisionists, a means of challenging the assumption that institutional religion was doomed to decline as a result of, and failed effectively to respond to, the social and cultural changes attendant upon industrialisation and urbanisation.

The assumption that secularisation and secularism were the inevitable companions of modernity, which in turn was typically socially located in the urban context, has informed secularisation theories either explicitly or implicitly. Social relations, it is argued, affective and oiled by religion in agrarian societies, became instrumental and contractual in the urban-industrial context. The relationship between religious decline and socio-economic change - (proletarian) population concentration in industrialised areas, urban growth and mobility - provided the basis for a 'pessimistic' interpretation of working-class religiosity which became established as a powerful historiographical orthodoxy. Squirearchy, paternalism and deference were succeeded by classes divided by social and urban-geographical gulfs. In the earlier historical applications of this theory - in the work of E.R. Wickham and K.S. Inglis in particular - the urban context was identified as one in which religion simply obtained no hold amongst the working class.[31]

Later studies accepted the pessimistic stance with some modification. A.D. Gilbert acknowledged the statistical growth of the churches during the period of industrialisation but explained such growth away in terms of a transitional period during which religious institutions functioned to stave off social and individual anomie, only temporarily delaying the inevitable

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30 Kenneth Thompson, 'The Secularization Debate', in Peter Gee and John Fulton (eds.), *Religion and Power, Decline and Growth: Sociological Analysis of Religion in Britain, Poland and the Americas* (1991), pp. 7-14.

31 E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (1957); K. S. Inglis, *The Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (1963).

decline of the churches in the wake of urbanisation.[32] Gilbert, in the Weberian tradition, identified rationalisation as the fundamental process of secularisation. Whilst accepting Weber's argument that the monotheistic Judeo-Christian tradition was inherently vulnerable to secularisation, replacing as it did a world of immanent spirits with a single transcendent God, Gilbert argued that the industrialisation and technological development that took place in the urban context rendered life more predictable and nature more manipulable, thus radically reducing the occasions on which resort had to be made to supernatural explanation.[33]

A number of historical studies have provided some empirical basis for secularisation theories emphasising the importance of institutional differentiation, partly in the attempt to challenge unilinear theories of secularisation which tended to assume that the churches were powerless in the context of the rapid socio-economic changes which produced urbanisation. Jeffrey Cox and Jeremy Morris argued that the varying successes of the churches in, respectively, Lambeth and Croydon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were significantly dependent on the roles which they assumed. Both gave particular emphasis to the initial expansion and subsequent shrinking role of the churches in the provision of welfare facilities as specialist agencies stepped into the role.[34] In Cox's study of Lambeth the emphasis is on the growth of State provision, whereas Morris argues the importance of reform and organisation of local government. Otherwise, Morris's statement of the thesis of his monograph on Croydon stands well for both studies:

> the discrediting of religion as a basis of local, united political action; the perceived failure of philanthropic endeavour; the dislodging of religion from its central, functional role in society;

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[32] A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (1976).

[33] A.D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (1980). Cf. Nicholas Abercrombie, John Baker, Sebastian Brett and Jane Foster, 'Superstition and Religion: the God of the Gaps', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 3 (1970), pp. 93-129.

[34] Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982); Jeremy N. Morris, *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon 1840-1914* (Royal Historical Society, 1992)

> the rise of alternative agencies, particularly reformed local government; and the gradual emergence of a more limited social role for the churches.[35]

Morris's study, in particular, is specifically concerned with the social status of religion and this is inextricably bound up with the reach of the arm of religious institutions. Hence, institutional differentiation and specialisation were central to religious decline.

Further historical studies have provided significant qualifications to the assumed correlation between urbanisation and inevitable secularisation. Rosemary Chadwick, in a study of Bradford between 1880 and 1914, and Callum Brown in his study of Scotland and in an article on church attendances in selected towns have both made extensive use of statistics to challenge the theory.[36] Chadwick found high levels of involvement amongst the skilled, but lower levels amongst the poorer, working class, whilst Brown pointed to the expansion of religion in the context of Scottish urbanisation and used statistical analyses to demonstrate the absence of any correlation between the degree of urbanisation and church attendance.

Both Alan Bartlett and Simon Green in studies of, respectively, Bermondsey and Yorkshire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, explored the ways in which the local churches drew a considerable proportion of the local working class into involvement via a variety of activities and clubs in addition to - and often rather than - Sunday worship.[37] However, such was the proliferation of peripheral clubs and societies that, according to Green, the central and distinctive roles of the churches, demanding a high level of commitment from adherents, was weakened.

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[35] Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, p. 172.

[36] R.M. Chadwick, 'Church and People in Bradford and District 1880-1914' (Oxford University DPhil. Thesis, 1986); Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997); *Idem*, 'Did Urbanisation Secularise Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook* (1988), pp. 1-15; *Idem*, 'A Revisionist Approach to Religious Change', in Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*, pp. 31-58; *Idem*, 'Religious Growth in Urban Societies', in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930* (1995), pp. 239-62.

[37] A.B. Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey 1880-1939' (Birmingham University PhD thesis, 1987); S.J.D. Green, 'Religion and the Industrial Town: with special reference to the West Riding and Yorkshire 1870-1920' (Oxford University D.Phil thesis, 1989) and *Religion in the Age of Decline, Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1996).

Stephen Yeo combined the two approaches - social morphological and institutional differentiation - in a study of Reading between c.1870 and 1914.[38] Yeo traced the fortunes of the churches of Reading in tandem with those of other voluntary organisations in the town and concluded that local affiliations focused on membership of voluntary groups were being undermined by the professionalisation and commercialisation of leisure activities. Thus church-related groups, together with many other voluntary bodies, were subject to social and economic structural changes.[39] Also important was the movement of wealthy employers away from contact with the working people of Reading both geographically (ultimately they moved away from Reading) and socially (the demise of company social activities enjoyed by workers and owners/managers together). These paternalist employers had subsidised the activities of the local churches to the extent that their removal from local society and the consequent withdrawal of such financial support left the churches helpless in the face of heavily capitalised organisations moving into Reading and competing for the support of local people. Thus Yeo attributes the problems of the churches in Reading to changes unrelated to the presence or absence of religious belief amongst the inhabitants of Reading.

Sociological Critiques of Secularisation Theory

The challenge to unilinear secularisation theories was not the preserve of historians. Sociologists lined up in opposition to, as well as in defence of, secularisation theories. Some argued that secularising forces were opposed by resistant and anti-secularising forces. The rise of new religious movements and cults - often of a fundamentalist and charismatic nature - led some to the conclusion that there is a constant reservoir of potential 'seekers' after individual

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38 Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (1976).

39 Similarly, Andrew Chandler has recently argued that the twentieth-century decline in church attendances 'might be better understood as an illustration of a wider decline of collective, participatory culture. Movements of all kinds, political parties included, have found their numbers sinking' ('Faith in the Nation? The Church of England in the 20th Century', *History Today* (May 1997), pp. 9-15 (p. 14)).

spiritual growth.[40] Stark and Bainbridge argued that the process of denominalization results in religious organisations moving away from a supernaturalistic tradition, leaving a gap which will be filled by more theologically conservative and supernaturalist sects promising the reward (immortality) which, in their theory, is the basic attraction of religion.[41] Thus, in Stark and Bainbridge's argument, secularisation is self-limiting. Certainly, the question of secularisation in the 'modern' west has now taken on an added relevance during the period of the post-modern. The recent recrudescence of supernaturalism in the form of western (and especially British) non-denominational charismatic Christian groups, and their activities in social welfare as witnessed in particular by Icthus in deprived parts of South East London,[42] reveals flaws in those secularisation theses which have argued that an increasing reliance on functional utilitarian rationality has marginalised supernatural religion to the point where the trend is irreversible. This growth, indeed, challenges historians and sociologists alike to reconsider the very processes of secularisation during the twentieth century with microscopic attention.

Others have questioned the implicit assumption in secularisation theories, that an irreligious present can safely be contrasted with a profoundly and universally religious past. The religious golden age is, such critics argue, rarely identified and never satisfactorily empirically demonstrated. A concentration on the beliefs and practices of an elite, dictated by the available evidence, has been accompanied by the imputation of such religiosity to the masses, producing a highly questionable picture of a religious past.[43]

The sociologist David Martin has taken perhaps the most extreme position in opposition to the concept of secularisation, arguing that a satisfactory and agreed definition is

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[40] E.g. C. Campbell, 'The cult, the cultic milieu and secularisation', in M. Hill (ed.), *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* (1972).

[41] R. Stark and W.S. Bainbridge, 'Secularization, revival and cult formation', *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, 4 (1980), pp. 85-119; *Idem.*, *A Theory of Religion* (New York, 1987).

[42] Ian Cotton, *The Hallelujah Revolution: The Rise of the New Christians* (1995). See also Ian Cotton, 'The hallelujah chorus', *The Guardian*, 25 November 1995.

[43] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 36-7; Daniel Bell, 'The Return of the Sacred: the Argument on the Future of Religion', *British Journal*

elusive and that the concept is, in any case, 'less a scientific concept than a tool of counter-religious ideologies'.[44] More helpfully, perhaps, Martin has highlighted the dangers in assuming that non-observance of institutional religious practices is an indication of apathy in religious matters, noting the wide prevalence of private prayer, approval of Christianity and religious education and of 'Christian' behaviour amongst many who rarely attended church.[45] In America, studies by Lenski and by Glock and Stark have systematically identified various dimensions of religiosity and noted the absence of any consistent positive correlation between them, thus further emphasising the dangers in arguing a secularisation thesis on the basis of studies of institutional religious practice alone.[46] Susan Budd has written of the combination of a 'radical decrease in the power of religious institutions' and 'private metaphysics which are not particularly secular', whilst Grace Davie has coined the phrase 'believing without belonging' to denote the continued prevalence of private religious belief and practice in the late twentieth century.[47]

In this respect, late twentieth-century sociologists provide an echo of research conducted in the 1940s and 1950s. Mass-Observation researchers in the 1940s were perhaps more puzzled than their subjects by the idiosyncrasies and the apparently contradictory combinations of belief and disbelief, observance and non-observance.[48] In the 1950s, Geoffrey Gorer was struck by the high levels of private religious practice and religious beliefs amongst

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of Sociology, xxviii (1977), pp. 419-449; R.M. Goodridge, 'The ages of faith - romance or reality?', *Sociological Review*, 23 (1975), pp. 381-96.

44 David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization* (1969), pp. 9-22 (p. 9).

45 Martin, *The Religious and the Secular*, pp. 122-3; *Idem*, *A Sociology of English Religion* (1967), pp. 52-76.

46 G. Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life* (New York, 1961); Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago, 1965).

47 Susan Budd, *Sociologists and Religion* (1973); Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford, 1994); *idem*, 'Believing without Belonging: is this the future of religion in Britain?', *Social Compass*, 37 (1990), pp. 455-69.

48 Mass-Observation, , *Puzzled People: a study of popular attitudes to religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London borough* (1947).

those who rarely attended any place of worship.[49] A survey carried out by the social psychologist Michael Argyle during the 1950s provided further substantial evidence of widespread religious belief and practice outside the purview of the institutional sphere.[50] The conclusions of Rowntree and Lavers in 1951 - framed by the authors' presumption of the truth of Christianity - were far from sanguine about popular attitudes to the churches, but identified a 'spiritual' hunger for the supernatural, a 'vestigial Christianity' (the idea that there is 'something in Christianity') and the persistence of a strong 'Christian ethic' concerning right and wrong, decency and the family.[51]

In his study of the working class in inter-war Leeds, Richard Hoggart provides perhaps the most nuanced and insightful of contemporary analyses of attitudes to religion. According to Hoggart the 'primary religion' of the majority of the working class who rarely attend church or chapel consists in a belief in the 'purposiveness of life' and in a life after death, and the observance of certain rites of passage (baptism of infants, marriage and funerals). Above all, Christianity for the working class, Hoggart argues, consists in a system of ethics - doing good, distinguishing right from wrong, decency, helping those in need - more than metaphysics, Christian dogma simply tending to confuse what is otherwise clear and simple.[52]

Popular Religion: Definitions and Studies

Thus the concept of 'popular religion' has entered the field of sociological and historical research into religion, directing scholars to explore the forms of belief which exist both amongst the faithful in the interstices of orthodox dogma and also amongst those who would be amongst the statistics of the unchurched. Robert Towler advocated the use of the term 'common religion' to denote 'those beliefs and practices of an overtly religious nature which are not under

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[49] G. Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955).
[50] Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion*, new edn. (1975).
[51] B. Seebohm Rowntree and G.R. Lavers, *English Life and Leisure: A Social Study* (1951), pp. 339-74.
[52] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp. 112-19.

domination of a prevailing religious institution', and such a definition has been generally accepted as the most helpful point of departure for exploring the notion of 'popular religion'.[53]

The comparison between national denominational orthodoxy and agenda with priorities and concerns at the local level has parallels with the growing interest of historians in the insights to be gained from employing the model of centre and periphery, first used by economists.[54] It is a model which has not been empirically explored in the context of religious history although proposed by P. Staples as a means for arriving at a working definition of popular religion.[55] Staples outlines a model of the vertically and horizontally integrated cone of decision-making, with a central core running vertically through different levels, the centre at each level providing both a channel for authority to descend through the cone and also a central decision-making core for its own horizontal level. Staples concludes:

> Religious phenomena which reveal themselves in the spheres at the bottom of the cone and are linked neither to specific centres at the horizontal level nor upwards to decision-making centres at national/international level can be regarded as *popular*.[56]

This is a more explicit elaboration of the somewhat rudimentary definition provided by Towler. The space between centre and periphery or the tension between an official institutional orthodoxy and popular understandings of religion is implicit in the title of David Clark's study of a North Yorkshire fishing village, *Between Pulpit and Pew*.[57] Clark's study is an exploration of the survival of folk religion, by which one is to understand non-institutionally based (or non-institutionally initiated) beliefs and practices, and its interaction with official institutional religion. The product of a blend of archival research and participant observation, Clark's study provides fascinating observations on the doggedly defended existence and identity of independent chapel communities, the role of religion in the annual communal cycle, rites of

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53 Robert Towler, *Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion* (1974), pp. 147-48.

54 See Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 79-84.

55 P. Staples, 'Official and Popular Religion in an Ecumenical Perspective', in Vrijhof and Waardenburg (eds.), *Official and Popular Religion*, pp. 244-93.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 271.

passage and occupationally-related beliefs of fishermen and miners. Clark justifies his study by the assertion that 'it is only through detailed examination of religious life in specific settings that we can develop an understanding of the manifold processes of secularisation'.[58] As the author openly admits, however, the choice of an exceptionally isolated small fishing and mining community was based on the expectation of finding local religious idiosyncrasies and it is difficult to accept that there is any typicality about Staithes which would give the study a much wider significance.[59] It remains, moreover, essentially an insider's view: it is the believer, the church and chapel-goer whose experience dominates the study. Those on the fringes or outside the community of believers, those who may have struggled with, lost, or never had a religious faith are silent.

The absence of the outsider's perspective was one of Edward Thompson's main criticisms of Robert Moore's study of Methodists and Methodism in the mining villages of Deerness Valley in County Durham between 1870 and 1926.[60] Moore's study includes important chapters on the ways in which Methodism functioned as a focus of the local community and on the ways in which that community sustained itself through time. Much of the study, however, is organised - and quite rightly - around issues which are intimately tied to the time and place under observation: the investigation of colliery-owner paternalism is particularly pertinent in the single-industry pit villages of the Deerness Valley, formed in the mid nineteenth century; and the extended studies of the relationships between local Methodism and local Liberalism and the Labour Movement are entirely to the point in a study which covers the early years of the twentieth century and concludes soon after World War I, a period during which the alignments of political and denominational allegiance were unusually parallel.

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[57] David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew* (Cambridge, 1982).

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[60] Robert Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics* (Cambridge, 1974). For Thompson's criticisms, 'On history, sociology and historical relevance', *British Journal of Sociology*, 27 (September 1976), pp. 387-402.

As Thompson observes, 'Methodism, under Dr Moore's investigation, can scarcely be seen as a theologically-determined form of religious expression at all'.[61] After commencing a chapter on the religious content and form of Methodism in the Deerness villages by referring to Glock and Stark's typology of religion - the experiential, intellectual, ideological, ritualistic and consequential dimensions[62] - Moore focuses on the intellectual, the ritualistic and the consequential aspects at the expense of the other two. Collective expressions of belief (ritual) are briefly considered in the forms of hymn-singing and prayer meetings. Investigation of the Methodists' knowledge about Methodist theology (intellectual) unearths only ignorance and confusion amongst the majority of the laity, and greater significance is ascribed to the ethical precepts which follow from adherence (consequential). Surprisingly, Moore locates personal experience only in the institutional setting of the class meeting (which was a forum for *articulating* personal experience), and the personally held beliefs (ideological) are considered to be inaccessible except in so far as they were elaborated in the texts of surviving sermons, addresses and Sunday School lessons, many of which were written by local preachers and other lay members and hence provide invaluable insights into the popular theology of the officialdom of local Methodism. The 'subterranean theology' of those without positions of leadership or at the margins of the Methodist community, which may or may not be characterised by idiosyncrasies that co-exist uncomfortably with orthodox Christian theology (and Clark's study of Staithes suggest that it may well), remain unearthed.[63] Thus, despite adopting Glock and Stark's typology of religiosity, Moore's exploration remains circumscribed by the orthodoxy of local Methodism. As such, his study adopts the first of our models - the comparison of the workings of local Methodism with denominational orthodoxy (though the latter is assumed rather than demonstrated) - but does not adequately extend the study into the beliefs and attitudes of the wider constituency which, he claims, was influenced by Methodism. This brings

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61 *Ibid.*, p. 397.
62 Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*..

us back to Thompson's criticism that Moore's study is skewed by a Methodist 'insider' perspective. The relationship between Methodist and secular culture, the ways in which each influenced the other and in particular the ways in which those at the margins of, or outside of church life, perceived the church, remain largely unexplored.

Historians and sociologists have, however, begun to explore the nature and extent of popular religious belief and practice from the perspective of the 'outsider', the irregular church- or chapel-attender. Pioneering work was undertaken first by James Obelkevich in a study of rural Lincolnshire between 1825 and 1875 and then by Jeffrey Cox for a slightly later period.[64] Obelkevich in particular extended the concept of religion beyond institutional definitions, the church being 'one setting for religion among many'.[65] Defining 'popular religion' as an identifiable entity distinct from institutional religion, Obelkevich devotes a whole chapter to the subject, exploring superstitions and popular traditional customs, but concludes that 'besides reflecting the deprivations of the rural poor they presupposed certain structural features in the agrarian economy and society'.[66] Thus class society and urbanisation would spell the end of these traditional forms of popular religion. Cox's study of Lambeth tended to support this view, re-defining popular religion in terms of the widespread allegiance to the churches amongst those who only rarely attended religious services and discussing this phenomenon within more overtly orthodox parameters under the title 'diffusive Christianity'.[67] Cox's exploration encompasses the various points of contact between the churches and the local population: the primary school, sacramental rites of passage, church and chapel clubs and philanthropic activities and special services. His brief comments on 'superstition' echo the conclusion of Obelkevich and draw on the arguments of Keith Thomas concerning the longer-term:

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[63] The term 'subterranean theology', is borrowed by Moore from David Martin, 'The Unknown Gods of the English', *The Advancement of Science*, 23, no. 108 (June 1966), pp. 56-60.

[64] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976); Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982).

[65] Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 260.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 310.

[67] Cox, *English Churches*, chapter 4, especially pp. 90-105.

> The rise of a class society, the spread of scientific ideas, and the emergence of an urban working-class culture had finished the job begun by the Protestant Reformation, and purged diffusive Christianity of centuries old non-Christian accretions.[68]

In Lambeth, Cox concludes, 'semi-pagan superstition had subsided into "luck"'. Most subsequent studies have tended to reinforce the view that superstition and folk religiosity were a feature of traditional rural or semi-rural societies, usually pre-dating the late nineteenth century.[69]

Such views have been subject to challenges in the light of new, and particularly oral, evidence. In 1987 Hugh McLeod reviewed the oral evidence for the late Victorian period. In his earlier major study of religion in late Victorian London, McLeod had concluded that religion had become a largely middle-class concern and that the great majority of the working class was alienated from the churches.[70] As a result of his review of the oral evidence, however, he was persuaded that religion had played a more important part in working-class lives than he had previously allowed. McLeod found that religion and the churches continued to provide important *social* functions for the working class: as a focus for community and the formation of relationships, in short, a way of life; as a site for the construction of sectarian identities; and as a mark of respectability. As McLeod notes, documentary sources inevitably tend to present the ideas and record the activities of the more organised sections of a population, the wealthier and larger organisations and the leaders rather than the rank and file. Hence, 'oral evidence is an invaluable means of redressing the balance'.[71]

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[68] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[69] See, for examples, Howard Burrows, 'Religious Provision and Practice in Some Mainly Rural Poor Law Districts of the Lowland Marches 1815-1914', 2 volumes (PhD thesis, CNAA, 1991), pp. 374-450; Mark Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 262-68; Wayne J. Johnson, 'Between Nature and Grace: The Folk Religion of Dissident Methodism in the North Midlands, 1780-1820', *Staffordshire Studies*, 5 (1993), pp. 71-80; R.W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Riural Society South Lincolnshire 1817-1875* (Hull, 1989), pp. 51-55; S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780-1845* (Dublin, 1982).

[70] Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (1974).

[71] McLeod, 'The Oral Evidence', p. 37.

The view that popular religious belief and practice had all but disappeared in the late nineteenth century context was forcibly challenged by Sarah Williams in a doctoral study of the London borough of Southwark between 1880 and 1939.[72] Williams used a combination of old and new oral evidence, written records of contemporary observers of working-class religious practice and a substantial collection of 'folk' materials gathered by a late nineteenth-century folklorist to demonstrate the vitality of a distinctive form of religious belief and practice within working-class popular culture in the urban context well into the twentieth century. According to Williams, this web of popular religion embraced both institutional forms of religiosity, appropriated and re-interpreted, and quasi-traditional forms of folk belief and superstition invested with meanings relevant to the urban context. Such forms of belief and their expressions formed a single 'discourse', believers making no distinction between what middle-class commentators would have described as 'pagan' and 'Christian' beliefs. They were, moreover, the preserve of those who remained firmly entrenched within working-class culture, thus excluding the convert, the regular church-attender, the 'true believer', whose beliefs and practices were more sharply defined in terms dictated by the churches.

The views of Williams have received a mixed reception. Hugh McLeod, for example, cites Williams' arguments in his introduction to a survey of religion in England 1850-1914, as a representative of one form of 'revisionism', but concludes that the revisionists of the late 1980s and early 1990s have 'more than redressed the balance' in arguing against the pessimistic view of working-class alienation from religion and the churches. Class divisions were vital for McLeod, who remains committed to a longer-term narrative of late nineteenth- and early twentieth century institutional religious decline.[73] On the other hand, Callum Brown

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[72] Sarah Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture: A Study of the South London Borough of Southwark c.1880-1939' (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 1993). See also, Sarah Williams, 'The Problem of Belief: The Place of Oral History in the Study of Popular Religion', *Oral History* (Autumn 1996), pp. 29-34; Sarah Williams, 'Urban Popular Religion and Rites of Passage', in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930* (1995), pp. 216-36.

[73] Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (1996), pp. 7 and 221-24. In *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1989*, new edn (Oxford, 1997), McLeod confines his exploration of British urban popular religion to two pages (pp. 124-25).

has argued that, contrary to the pessimistic cries of churchmen about religious decline between 1890 and 1939, in Scotland 'little actually changed in terms of popular adherence to the churches [...] new sources of evidence [...show that] religion was extremely important in the lives of common people'.[74] Brown brings the 'haemorrhage of faith' much closer to the present, dating it to the period since 1939 and particularly since the 1950s, explaining the changes in terms of changing residential patterns (particularly council estates), increasing material prosperity and youth culture.[75] Brown has since gone even further, arguing that the 1960s need to be seen as the end of a 'long durée', a period extending from around 1780 to 1963 which he has dubbed 'the age of puritanism' during which the diffusive grip of Christian culture was hegemonic. Brown argues that historians have been trapped by the contours and definitions of working-class religion provided by clergymen and concludes that the evidence of experiential material such as autobiography and oral testimony, and particularly the work of Sarah Williams, suggests that the narrative of religious history needs to be radically re-evaluated.[76]

As Brown acknowledges, his arguments concerning the nature and extent of popular religious belief and practices and the determinants of their decline remain largely empirically untested. Whilst nineteenth and early twentieth century religion has been subjected to considerable study, the post-war period remains under-explored, particularly from a historical perspective. The work of the Opies has demonstrated that school children retained a variety of traditional superstitious beliefs and popular customs well into the 1950s[77] and David Clark's study of Staithes has already been mentioned. The treatment of adult 'religion', however, has in some cases tended to move into the more academic realm of variants on Luckmann's 'invisible religion'. The early (doctoral) work of Edward Bailey fascinatingly explores what he termed

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[74] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 147.

[75] Brown, *Religion and Society*, pp. 158-76, especially pp. 166-74.

[76] Callum Brown, 'Secularisation in the 1960s', unpublished paper presented to the Birmingham University Religious History Seminar Series, 18 February 1998.

[77] Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford, 1959).

'implicit religion' in the context of the Bristol parish in which he worked as both Anglican minister and barman in a public house. But his equation of religion with ultimate values and the importance he assigns to the sacredness of the self, whilst amenable to perceptive and sensitive research by means of participant observation, is less helpful to the historian who is forced to work with definitions of religion more easily recognised by people whose accounts of the past he/she must use. Bailey's equally perceptive later writings on contemporary popular religion are more helpful, giving rather more emphasis to the substantive content of religious belief, an appropriated form of Christianity providing a framework of values which both underpins the sacredness of the self and generates a moral imperative to help others. In Bailey's argument Christianity is a value system producing a way of life encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount - or helping a little old lady across the street - the second commandment of Christ becoming the first commandment of 'Christianity'. For Bailey, the belief in the value of values is existentially fundamental but the power of acculturation invests Christianity with a defining role. Thus popular religion is defined in a series of credal statements:

> 'I believe in Christianity; I insist on the right of everyone to make up his own mind; I affirm the value of values [...] Everyone has to have a value system; 'Christianity' is the best value-system available; Christ, God and the Church stand for 'Christianity'.[78]

Thus many retain a strong sense of allegiance to a denomination - particularly the Church of England as a central component of a sense of national identity - or to particular churches or chapels although rarely taking part in public services of worship.

A Working Definition of Popular Religion

Significant advances have thus been made in moving towards broader definitions of religious belief and practice and in revising any simplistic picture, sociological or historical, of religious

decline and secularisation. Yet to move from a definition of religion based on institutional parameters to one which embraces a variety of popular beliefs and practices is, as Sarah Williams has observed, highly problematic.[79] One is confronted by the need to identify both the substantive content of 'popular religion' and the social constituency within which it is located. Neither is so clearly self-defining as they are when the focus is restricted to institutional religion and its practitioners. The problem is unintentionally demonstrated in a recent essay which, under the heading 'The Religions of the Silent Majority' (the plural gives the game away), considers late twentieth-century popular religion under four headings - conventional religion, civil religion, common religion and invisible and surrogate religion - but concedes that 'popular religious ideas do not readily fit into superimposed categories'.[80]

The work of Sarah Williams is the most ambitious and radical of revisions to the pessimistic picture of working-class religion, employing a definition of religion based on 'anthropological interpretations of discourse'.[81] This study seeks to extend Williams' work, in a very different geographical context, into the later part of the twentieth century, employing a similar definition of religion. It shares with Williams' study the avoidance of any *a priori* definition of religion for one which emerges from the accounts of interviewees whose testimonies constitute the major source material for the study. As such it works with a substantive rather than a functional definition of religion. It similarly identifies the co-mingling of what, to the observer, may appear to be discrete discourses: that of the church and orthodox Christianity and that of an oral tradition and folk culture.

The current study differs from Williams' study, however, in important ways, apart from the distinctly different organisation of the material (outlined below) and the exploration (in

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[78] Edward Bailey, 'The Folk Religion of the English People', in Paul Badham (ed.), *Religion, State, and Society in Modern Britain* (Lampeter, 1989), pp. 145-58; *idem*, 'The Religion of the People', in Tony Moss (ed.), *In Search of Christianity* (1986), pp. 178-88.

[79] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 34-44.

[80] John Wolffe, 'The Religions of the Silent Majority', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945, Volume I Traditions* (1993), pp. 305-46.

[81] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', p. 37.

chapter 7) of the evidence for the decline of popular religion. First, whilst the accounts of interviewees did, to an extent, demonstrate similar evidence of a seamless web combining folk and orthodox beliefs and practices in a single and undifferentiated discourse, there was also some evidence to the contrary. As subsequent chapters (particularly chapter 4) will show, twentieth-century working-class residents of Dudley and the Gornals did, in some respects, feel that there were important differences, if difficult to articulate, between their beliefs in the Christian God and some of their superstitious and folk beliefs.

Second, the evidence adduced in the following chapters strongly suggests that Williams is overly restrictive in confining her definition of popular religion to the constituency of those on the margins of institutional religion. The oral evidence for this study was gathered from a range of interviewees with varying degrees of allegiance to, and involvement in, the local churches, from the regular weekly attender to the almost totally unchurched. As the following chapters will show, many aspects of popular religion which would have been frowned upon by the official representatives of the churches were amongst the beliefs and practices of their members and faithful adherents. Thus whilst those on the fringes recognised some differences between the status and origins of the components of their religious beliefs, many of those apparently at the core of religious involvement shared many aspects of the unorthodox beliefs of popular religion. Few were firmly in one camp or the other and the differences between the regular and irregular attender are, in most cases, better conceived in terms of shades of grey than of sharp dividing lines.

A further difference between this study and that of Williams may seem to contradict the last point, but rather points to the range of human responses to religious questions. During the period under study, a strict and fervent adherence to the tenets of traditional evangelical belief became an enduring feature of a core of evangelical Christians, particularly within the Methodist churches of the Gornal villages and within an off-shoot from them, Eve Lane Pentecostal church. This evangelical core strenuously resisted and rejected not only the

accretions of popular Christianity, but also the powerful modernising (and arguably secularising) forces within their own denomination. For this group, adherence to a particular theology became also a matter of local identity, although as the concluding chapter will argue, it drew importantly on influences external to the locality, particularly in the form of missions. It may be straining the definition of 'popular religion' to include such forms of religious belief and practice, but such responses were undeniably 'popular' in so far as they took the form of lay choices in a locality, choices by people who believed they were defining themselves and their beliefs in opposition to the trends they perceived in the modern world. Indeed, similar points have previously been made. Commenting on the argument of Lenski that the periphery, being less tightly controlled than the centre and more vulnerable to extraneous influences, will tend to undermine orthodoxy, Staples points to the trends in the church since late 1960s in which it has been the laity which has defended traditional orthodoxies against the modernising emphases of the centre/hierarchy.[82] In a study of the Church of England in the twentieth century, E.R. Norman claims to identify a general tendency for theologians and church leaders, drawing on contemporary intellectual trends, to remain an awkward step ahead of grass-roots belief, an observation which problematizes the very notion of orthodoxy.[83]

A Methodological Note

A study of popular religion in the Black Country is not blessed with the rich documentary source materials that are available for areas of London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is for this geographical area during this period no equivalent to the Booth survey of 1902 or Llewellyn Smith's survey of 1931. Nor did local twentieth-century clergymen follow the habit of their nineteenth-century predecessors by being men of letters and leaving published accounts of their lives and labours. Moreover, the great era of the folklore

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82 Staples, *loc. cit.*, pp. 274-80. See also, G. Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics and Family Life* (New York, 1961).

83 E.R. Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970: A Historical Study* (Oxford, 1976)

collectors was drawing towards a close by 1914 and such publications of Black Country folklore and folk superstitions as exist are nineteenth-century collections or twentieth-century derivatives thereof.[84] Whilst such material proved to be valuable as a means of generating oral accounts it could not be adduced independently as evidence for the period under consideration. Far more valuable as sources of comparative material were collections relating either to other geographical localities or to the nation as a whole. In the first category the Lancaster oral history archive contains valuable material relating to popular religious beliefs and practices and a sample of interviewee transcripts provides supplementary and comparative evidence at certain points in the study. Fuller use is made of the resources of the Mass-Observation archive. The organisation published its own study of religious belief and practice in 1947 - *Puzzled People* - but the archive contains a wealth of additional manuscript material ranging from attitudes to the churches to beliefs in luck.[85]

The local evidence concentrates on Anglicans and Nonconformists (predominantly Methodists), to the exclusion of Roman Catholics. Whilst a study of popular religious beliefs and practices amongst twentieth-century Catholics would unquestionably be of great value, it was felt that the inclusion of such a focus in this study would be inappropriate for two reasons. First, a proper exploration of Roman Catholicism would have extended the study to an unmanageable degree, demanding consideration not only of the distinctive beliefs and devotional practices of Catholicism, but also a careful study of the distinctiveness of Catholic school education. Second, any such extended consideration would have been disproportionate to local denominational distributions. The expansion of the Roman Catholic population in twentieth-century Britain did not have a great impact in the selected localities. Central Dudley, for example, had just a single Catholic church, as compared with three in nearby Wolverhampton. The Anglican and Methodist churches enjoyed a much greater presence in

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[84] See chapter 4.

terms of buildings and regular adherents and also had a far greater constituency of occasional attenders. Thus to the extent that the local churches and chapels inflected the nature of popular religion, it is to Anglicanism and Methodism which we must primarily turn.

A study which includes not only the unchurched but also regular church-goers must necessarily exploit some of the standard source materials for local religious history. Thus, additional to an extensive trawl of local newspapers, considerable use was made of local church and circuit materials, including published magazines, minutes of meetings, various membership lists, registers of services and church and chapel histories. A good proportion of this material was deposited in local archives, though I am indebted to ministers of the various churches for access to the considerable volume of twentieth-century records still held in church safes. An additional body of documentary sources was revealed more by serendipity than by strategy, whilst other materials which, it was hoped, would reveal themselves, ultimately proved elusive. Collections of Nonconformist material in particular have remained in private hands and were located partly by appeals in the press though mainly by word of mouth during the oral interviews.[86] Other materials promised to be invaluable sources, like *The Messenger*, the monthly magazine of the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council which was published throughout the period, but has apparently survived only in tiny numbers, scattered around households by virtue of containing announcements of local births, deaths and marriages. Public holdings also occasionally proved disappointing. In particular, no diocesan visitation returns were traced for either the Dudley or the Gornal Anglican churches in the holdings at Lichfield and Worcester. Whilst it was possible to obtain personal recollections from some of the surviving Anglican and Methodist ministers, these were sometimes somewhat clouded by

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[85] The Mass-Observation unpublished reports draw on a variety of sources, including sample surveys, regular feedback from their selected (mainly middle-class) panel members and the observations of its own local reporters.

[86] Thus, for example, several volumes of recorded minutes of meetings of the Gornal and Sedgley Evangelical Free Church Council were eventually traced after persistent (and perhaps nagging) questioning of several interviewees.

uncertainty about whether the recollection was about Dudley or Gornal or from another phase of their ministry. Nor were there ministers surviving from the earlier part of the period.

Documentary sources were valuable primarily as a means of investigating associational religion and are adduced as evidence more fully in chapter 3 than elsewhere. That is not to say, however, that they are useful only as a means of investigating the practices of the regular church-goers. Some of the fullest accounts - particularly in local newspapers and church magazines and annual reports - concern the annual special services which attracted attenders from a far broader constituency. Written sources produced by the churches also provide invaluable insights on the causes of the success or failure of the church to attract worshippers as perceived by ministers and members, and on the perceived causes of declining numbers. Occasional comments in parish magazines also reveal something of the persistence of popular traditions which brought the wider constituency of potential worshippers into contact with the churches: popular understandings of the customs of churching and baptism, for example.

The principal source, however, is oral testimony.[87] This is necessarily so in any attempt to reveal the nature and extent of popular religious beliefs and experiences which remain largely undocumented. The conclusion to the thesis provides a review of the potentials and problems of oral evidence in illuminating aspects of religious belief, practice and experience in the light of the research undertaken and the arguments presented, but it is necessary to provide some preliminary comments here.

The methodological and theoretical problems of oral history research are still vigorously debated by enthusiasts and sceptics alike. Some of the problems of oral evidence have been shown, by pioneers in the field such as Paul Thompson, to be qualitatively little different from those of any other type of historical source.[88] Oral evidence differs little from

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[87] See Appendix 1 for details of interviewees and the interview process.

[88] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1988); *idem*, 'Problems in Oral History', *Oral History*, 4 (1971), pp. 1-47; for practical accounts of the problems and potentials of oral evidence for obtaining historical accuracy see also, Trevor Lummis, *Listening to*

many forms of documentary evidence, for example, in that the latter are also retrospective records often taken from oral sources. Oral evidence is frequently required to provide evidence for, and is recalled after, a longer time span, but the evidence of psychological studies of memory substantiate the common-sense observation that the memories of the elderly are particularly reliable over the long term or, at worst, less unreliable than short-term memory. Indeed, in some respects the distance in time can be an advantage, reducing the risk of encountering the problem of wilful distortion. Criticisms that oral history, relying on personal reminiscence, is likely to be plagued by lapses of memory not suffered by documentary sources can be countered by the observation that documentary sources in the twentieth century are frequently anything but unselfconsciously or unintentionally bequeathed, but the result of weeding and decisions about what is worth preserving.[89]

Nevertheless, critics have pointed to the apparent problems of subjectivity and factual reliability in oral evidence. Two responses to the latter problem are appropriate. First, oral evidence is probably most successfully used not to reconstruct a unique series of events, the precise timing and sequence of which is likely to be important to the historian but quite possibly confused in the mind of the interviewee, but to reveal repeated patterns of experience, structures of thought and mentalities. Since these do not generally require (and often are not amenable to) precise timing and commonly draw on what is personal and familiar to the interviewee, the problem of factual reliability is diminished. Second, where factual reliability is in doubt, the usual procedures of the historian of checking documentary accounts for internal consistency and verifying them through triangulation with other types of source can equally be applied to oral history. Assigning dates to accounts is frequently a problem for respondents, but oral evidence can often be dated during or after (by means of other sources) an interview by encouraging an interviewee to relate an otherwise un-dateable account to apparently unrelated

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History (1987) and Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth, *By Word of Mouth: Élite Oral History* (1983).

concerns (place of abode at the time; current affairs locally or nationally etc.). Documentary sources, moreover, can often help to trigger recollections and oral evidence can provide an invaluable commentary on documentary sources which, on their own, may be of limited value.

More sophisticated criticisms of oral history have focused on the issue of subjectivity, a problem which appears to be generic to the form, or at least generic to the life-story whether written as autobiography or given orally. The problem is, at first glance, somewhat more intractable. It relates closely, however, to the apparent problem of factual reliability. Historians have been accused by specialists in cultural studies of using oral evidence in a naively empirical way, seeking to employ oral history as a clear window on to the past through which to view historical fact.[90] The view of Richard Johnson and his colleagues in the Popular Memory Group at Birmingham University is that since memories of the past are inevitably filtered through subsequent events, empirical oral history is flawed. Moreover, life stories are shaped both by 'dominant memory' (ideologically generated versions of the past perpetuated by various media and publicly shared - heritage, the monarchy, Westminster, education etc.) and by practices of everyday life which generate and shape memory through anecdotes and narrative.[91] Johnson *et al.* recommend, therefore, that life stories be treated as texts and subjected to 'cultural' readings, focusing on the ways in which an account makes sense of a life

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89 Gwyn Prins, 'Oral History', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 114-39 (p. 130ff).

90 For the most damning criticisms of oral history as practised by modern historians, see the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Popular Memory Group's 'Popular memory: theory, politics, method' in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (eds.), *Making Histories: Studies in history-writing and politics* (1982), pp. 205-52. For more sympathetic accounts equally concerned with the shaping impact of cultural experiences on oral evidence, see Kristina Minister, 'A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview' in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (1991), pp. 27-41; Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (Autumn 1981), pp. 96-107; and the collection of essays in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By* (1990).

91 There are certainly cases where this process of formation of a narrative of a respondent's life story becomes very visible: one nonagenarian Methodist whom I interviewed twice with a gap of a year retold parts of his story verbatim on the second occasion. As a lay preacher and regular speaker at various events, it is not surprising that he had had cause to shape a narrative of his own life which is now ready for various occasions. This is not to say that it is in any way falsified, but merely to

history, especially through the shaping of narrative. The scholar should pay attention to the influence of 'cultural repertoires', language and codes: for example, the centrality of story-telling to working-class accounts of social reality (male versions being tight and 'closed' with a moral ending; female versions being open and self-deprecatory).[92] This sort of criticism can be illustrated through difficulties which may be peculiar to the study of religious belief through oral history. In all cases, one needs to be aware that a retrospective rationalisation of a life story provides the basis of narrative construction (the 'how I got from there to here' continuous line) with a definite trajectory; amongst religious people, one needs to consider the possibility that this trajectory has been interpreted within a framework of divine purpose for the individual and even within a broader teleology.

There are certainly valid and cogent arguments made in the criticisms of the Popular Memory Group, but there are two possible responses. The first would be the empiricist reply. Historians, it could be argued, are being taken to task for a problem, the root of which lies at the different temporal foci of historians and sociologists/cultural studies scholars: to study the forms of narrative and the cultural construction of memory is an appropriate and viable approach for the cultural studies scholar whose imperative is presentist and who can therefore treat the 'life history' as a text, the interest of which lies in the very socio-cultural construction which, Johnson argues, vitiates its historical value; the historian's concerns, however, are essentially of the past and as such, he/she must seek to deal with the fruits of memory, undertaking the necessary procedures of triangulation and internal consistency checking, rather than undertaking a study of the workings of memory itself which is essentially a different exercise.[93] Indeed, the Popular Memory Group appear to push their argument towards

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indicate that life stories can be recalled and given shape for purposes other than those of simple verisimilitude (moral instruction, for example) before the oral historian hears them.

92 The differences between male and female accounts has been interestingly explored by Kristina Minister, 'A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview' in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (1991).

93 I suspect that this would be more or less the line taken by Anthony Seldon, for example. Paul Thompson, who receives the harshest treatment at the hands of the Popular Memory Group has clearly accepted the thrust of these criticisms, if not the conclusions concerning the inaccessibility

Althusserian conclusions: since language camouflages more than it reveals, all documents are radically imperfect as guides to facts. This is not only to attack empiricism but to go on to dismiss empirical work itself. In the light of postmodernist critiques of history, historians should be able to recognise and render more explicit the constructed nature of their own and other narratives without wholly despairing of the value of empirical work.

The second response, then, would accept the validity of the points raised by Johnson *et al.* without accepting their conclusions. Historians must find a way of working with oral evidence which both provides access to perspectives on the past and acknowledges and considers the codes and forms of narratives in which people remember. The former demands a careful and critical assessment of interviewee and interview. The latter demands careful attention to repeated phrases, the structures of stories and the language of accounts. It is important to be aware of 'silences', to understand interviewees' meanings attached to words (the denotation and connotation of vocabulary), to distinguish experience and learned information (age and location information about location can often authenticate the provenance as direct experience) and to distinguish information and views which are individual from those which are communal.[94]

The problem of retrospective rationalisation can often be identified by a simple question - 'Is that how you thought then?' - which often provokes careful reconsideration, sometimes resulting in a guarded uncertainty; the historian can then seek to work on two levels, seeking to distinguish between interviewees in historical context and interviewees in the present as products of their own personal histories. Moreover, in interviewing people about religious

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evidence of historical value from oral history, as witnessed by the recent volume, Samuel and Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By.*

94 See Lummis, *Listening to History*, pp. 83-93. For a more extensive treatment of communal memory, see J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *The Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford, 1992).

beliefs one can, as Hugh McLeod suggests, 'record the frequently repeated phrases and maxims, in terms of which people tried to define their understanding of God's workings'.[95]

The problems attributed to oral history as a methodology are greater when one is seeking to use oral testimony principally to illuminate that which is external to the experiences and beliefs of the interviewee. When those personal experiences and beliefs are themselves the subject matter, such problems are considerably diminished. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that one is still confronted by the problems of reinterpretation, conscious or unconscious, of past experience and belief in the light of subsequent experience and belief and, particularly amongst the elderly, by the problem of nostalgia. A historical study which makes extensive use of oral testimony is thus necessarily, in part, a study of people in the present as well as people in the past. Oral interviewees, like anybody else, are the products and the producers of their memories: memories are constructed and given a narrative form retrospectively but in turn shape the way in which subsequent experiences (and hence memories) are received and shaped.[96] However, since historians are now being forced to acknowledge the constructed nature of their own accounts and to recognise that their narratives do not inhere within the events themselves,[97] the void between the past as it actually happened and the accounts of the past in oral testimony is simply one layer of interpretation among many. The ways in which individual and group identities are constructed through memory are, moreover, now being investigated as an integral part of the research agenda by historians using oral evidence.[98]

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[95] McLeod, 'The Oral Evidence', p. 37.

[96] See A. Baddeley, 'The Limitations of Human Memory', in L. Moss and H. Goldstein (eds.), *The Recall Method in the Social Sciences* (1979).

[97] Some historians, like Hayden White and Keith Jenkins, are now dedicating their work to explorations of just these issues (see Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978); *idem*, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973); *idem*, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987); Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (1991); *idem*, *On "What is History?"* (1995).

[98] See, for example, Louisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory* (Cambridge, 1987); Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (Autumn 1981), pp. 96-107.

What then of the achievements of oral history to date? Major studies have now been based on oral history. Prominent amongst them were two which generated substantial collections of oral testimony which have been used in subsequent studies by other scholars: Paul Thompson's study of experiences of life during the Edwardian period and Elizabeth Roberts' studies of the experiences of women in Lancashire towns during the twentieth century.[99] Both demonstrated the value of oral history in throwing light on aspects of social history which would be otherwise hidden: Thompson on the divergent experiences of different classes living through a period which has become mythologised in public memory as a Golden Age; and Roberts on the ways in which the family and the home served as a vital economic unit and on many aspects of working-class women's lives at home, at work and at leisure.

These two major surveys provide scattered material on religious beliefs and practices, some of which has been sensitively used by other scholars.[100] Elizabeth Roberts found that amongst her interviewees 'the most striking and obvious fact about religion during the first part of this period [1890-1930] is the significant part it played in all but one family's life'.[101] Nevertheless, the religious beliefs and experiences of ordinary people have remained under-explored in published work, particularly for the period after World War I, and of the major oral history surveys for the late Victorian period up until c.1914 none has been centrally concerned with religion.[102] In the early 1970s, Clive Field conducted a national survey of Methodists alive between 1900 and 1932 through questionnaires and interviews. Based on just over 100 returns, Field provided a statistically grounded sociological profile of English Methodism

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99 Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (1975); Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford, 1995); Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: an oral history of working-class women, 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984) and *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster 1890-1930* (Lancaster, 1976).

100 McLeod reviews material from both collections in 'The Oral Evidence'. Williams, 'Popular Culture and Religious Belief', makes considerable use of material from Thompson and Vigne's Essex Oral History Project.

101 Roberts, *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster*, p. 62.

102 Sarah Williams's work is shortly to be published by the Oxford University Press. Another doctoral study, by Roger Laidlaw, considers aspects of popular religion, but remained unavailable for consultation at the time this thesis was completed. David Clark's study of Staithes was of course a

between these years, exploring relations between home and chapel, Sunday and weekday chapel activities, congregational structure and attitudes to the wider world. However, a national survey of this sort conducted for the purposes of generating quantitative data tends to produce an account of free-floating percentages devoid of any but the most tentative of explanations relating religious to socio-cultural changes.[103]

In a smaller-scale survey of the experiences of working-class childhood and youth in Bristol between 1889 and 1939, Stephen Humphries used oral evidence to demonstrate, amongst other things, the ways in which working-class children developed forms of resistance to religion which, Humphries argues, was a vehicle for middle-class control through the generation of deference and patriotism amongst day and Sunday School children.[104] Hugh McLeod has argued that Humphries provides a perspective which may be far from typical: the questions were designed to elicit critical rather than positive assessments of the role of religion in respondents' lives, focusing on irreverence and resistance and hence precluding the possibility of a more nuanced portrait of the ambivalence of the attitudes of many people who may combine harsh criticisms of institutional Christianity and its practitioners with strong personal beliefs and even a firm denominational allegiance.[105]

Thus Williams' study of popular beliefs in Southwark constitutes an important turning point not only in terms of the substantive historical issues with which it deals but also in methodological terms. As Williams states, 'Religious historians have tended to use oral history to support studies of the institutional church and as a tool with which to extract additional factual information on such issues as church attendance'.[106] As Williams' study demonstrates,

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small-scale study and, as a sociologist, his work as a participant observer and interviewer was primarily concerned with the situation prevailing at the time of his research.

[103] Clive Field, 'A Socilogical Profile of English Methodism, 1900 - 1932', *Oral History*, 4, No.1 (1976), pp. 73-95.

[104] Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1981).

[105] Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History Journal* (1986), pp. 31-49.

[106] Williams, 'Popular Culture and Religious Belief', pp. 52-53.

the generation and collection of oral testimony offers the opportunity to address one of the major questions raised in the secularisation debate but never satisfactorily resolved: was the decline in the influence of the churches paralleled by a corresponding decline in religious beliefs? Nevertheless, the potential of oral history for the exploration of personal and private dimensions of religiosity has only just begun to be explored. This study attempts, therefore, to add to a small corpus of work, accepting the challenge set by Hugh McLeod over ten years ago when he suggested that oral history presents historians with an opportunity to explore such under-researched dimensions of religious belief.[107]

For the present study, a total of sixty people were interviewed at varying lengths, some during a single session, others over the course of several meetings. Thirty people were interviewed from Dudley and thirty from the nearby Gornal villages.[108] Of the total of sixty interviewees, thirty-eight were women.[109] An attempt was made to produce a sample which embraced widely varying degrees of involvement in institutional religion, from the lifelong attender to the almost totally disassociated. The changing circumstances of people's lives make it difficult to assign some to one end or another of this spectrum, some moving in and out of involvement in church and chapel at different times of their lives. Most fall somewhere between the two poles. However, twenty-eight of the sample can be considered amongst the population of firm and regular churchgoers (and are referred to as such throughout the thesis), whilst the remaining thirty-two were involved in church or chapel on a regular basis only as children and infrequently as adults.[110]

Initial contacts were established through various channels: word of mouth, church groups, pensioners' and Age Concern and Darby and Joan clubs, community centres and public houses. Interviews were carried out most commonly at the home of the interviewee, and the

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[107] McLeod, 'The Oral Evidence', p. 37.

[108] Chapter 2 explains the rationale for the geographical foci of the study.

[109] The imbalance is not deliberate, but simply the product of availability and willingness to be interviewed.

[110] Appendix 1 indicates the regularity of involvement of each interviewe.

great majority were interviewed alone. In a few cases, husbands and wives were interviewed together during some or all meetings. Although a semi-structured interview agenda was established at the outset, this was subsequently modified in the light of early responses. Moreover, whilst every attempt was made to cover the same broad range of subjects during each interview, the responses of each individual interviewee determined the extent to which each different subject area was explored and also often generated unanticipated issues for exploration. The result was that in the great majority of cases the interviews approximated more to a free-flowing conversation than to a check-list dominated survey. No attempt was made to conceal from the interviewee the interests of the researcher or to approach the subject of religious practice and belief obliquely. With interviewees whose involvement in institutional religion had been minimal, assurances that the research was not being undertaken for any religious organisation were occasionally sought and sometimes, when considered appropriate, offered in advance of any request. It was occasionally also felt to be helpful to inform interviewees that the interviewer was not actively involved in any church, local or otherwise. The interviewer's distance, in both geographical and emotional respects, from the focus of the research was, it seems clear, an advantage. On a number of occasions interviewees volunteered accounts which, it was emphasised, had previously been the preserve of a very few or, in some cases, had hitherto remained unrelated to anybody.

Forty-two of the sixty interviewees were interviewed on more than one occasion. Multiple meetings with interviewees carried, of course, an opportunity cost: a reduction in the number of interviewees it was possible to meet. The benefits of multiple meetings, however, have to be weighed against the advantages which might have accrued from generating a larger sample. First meetings usually included friendly conversation and sociability, and subsequent sessions provided not only an opportunity to concentrate on the task in hand, but there was sometimes discernible an increased willingness to provide accounts which were seemingly withheld during first meetings despite suitable opportunities.

A Chapter Outline

The distinctions drawn by Glock and Stark between different dimensions of religious commitment provide the organisational framework for the study. Since one of the major findings of the study has been the co-existence - within constituencies both of considerable and of minimal associational religious involvement - of what may be termed 'orthodox' and 'folk' elements of religiosity, it was felt that such a thematic structure would better support the main arguments than a structure which attempted to treat the (somewhat notional) constituencies of differing involvement separately. In spite of the impossibility of treating entirely discretely dimensions of religiosity which are intricately related, it is also hoped that the structure will minimise the danger of repetition.

Some important modifications of Glock and Stark's typology have been made for the purposes of this study. Whilst they distinguish between religious belief ('the ideological dimension') and religious knowledge ('the intellectual dimension'), in this study the latter is subsumed within the former. The reason for this alteration is partly one of methodological difficulty and partly one of theoretical approach. First, it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop a means of assessing the 'religious knowledge' - as distinct from the religious beliefs - of interviewees without running a grave risk of giving offence and ruining the bond of mutual trust and respect which is essential to the interview situation (Glock and Stark unhelpfully suggest 'religious literacy tests'![111]). Furthermore, whilst religious beliefs will usually result in some form of religious practice (the ritualistic dimension) and also in certain non-ritualistic forms of behaviour (the consequential dimension), religious knowledge *per se* need have no relation to other dimensions of religiosity (as Glock and Stark acknowledge) and hence, unlikely to result in any social expression, is less amenable to the empirical research through time which is the business of the historian. More importantly, perhaps, to treat religious knowledge as an

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[111] Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society*, p. 33.

independently assessable dimension of religiosity would demand an *a priori* assumption about the contents of a religious canon, and hence be theoretically inconsistent with the approach adopted here, which presents popular religion as a form of religiosity which demands investigation *sui generis*, and rejects the assumption that it is an impoverished or bastardised form of institutional religion. In so far as belief presupposes some knowledge, religious knowledge will be considered and the sources of that knowledge will be subjected to investigation.

The second difference between the approach adopted here and that outlined by Glock and Stark is in the definition of the 'consequential dimension'.[112] Glock and Stark include within this dimension not only the responsibilities but also the rewards accruing to the religious believer:

> The rewards may be immediate or promised for the future. Immediate rewards would include such things as peace of mind, freedom from worry, a sense of well being, or [...] material success. Among future rewards would be included salvation, promises of eternal life, reincarnation in a higher social category.[113]

Whilst 'material success' may result from behaviour motivated by religious belief, and hence appropriately be considered within the 'consequential' category, the other 'immediate rewards' seem more properly to belong to the 'experiential' dimension and will be considered as such here. The 'future rewards' are sadly not amenable to empirical research - historical or sociological - as part of a 'consequential dimension' and will be considered in this study in their more mundane existence as religious beliefs.

Chapters 3 to 6, therefore, explore popular religion in Dudley and the Gornals according to the categories defined by Glock and Stark as the 'ritualistic', 'ideological', 'consequential' and 'experiential' dimensions. The penultimate chapter, however, examines the evidence and posits some explanations for the decline of popular religious beliefs and practices. The chapter eschews an approach which attempts to identify any master-cause for

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[112] *Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

secularisation, rather identifying a number of causes which combined to produce religious decline. It thus provides an empirical study in some of the major strands of the secularisation debate. Shiner's disaggregation of strands of meaning denoted by the term 'secularisation' is helpful in establishing the parameters of the meanings of secularisation as discussed in the penultimate chapter, five strands in particular informing the themes to be discussed: the loss in prestige and significance of previously accepted religious doctrines and institutions; an increased concern with mundane as opposed to supernatural concerns; the privatisation of religion; the desacralisation of the world, whereby rational-causal explanations increasingly replace supernatural explanations; the abandonment of any commitment to traditional values and practices, and a utilitarian basis for decision-making.[114] Shiner's categories are descriptive but chapter 7 provides some tentative explanations for secularisation in terms of circumstances which were partly local and particular (though undoubtedly replicated elsewhere) and partly embedded within much more generally applicable social and cultural changes.

The final chapter reviews the significance of the evidence adduced in the earlier chapters both in terms of the substantive historical concerns - the nature and extent of popular religion and of the course of secularisation - and in terms of the methodological problems and potentials involved in extensive collection and deployment of oral testimony.

The nature and extent of religious belief and practice can only be understood within their context - temporal, geographical, social, cultural and economic - even if one scrupulously avoids a simple determinism. It is the purpose of the next chapter, therefore, briefly to explore some salient and relevant aspects of the history of Dudley and the Gornals between 1914 and 1965.

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[113] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[114] L. Shiner, 'The concept of secularisation in empirical research', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 6 (1966), pp. 207-20.

Chapter 2

Dudley and the Gornals

Spatial Definitions

The town of Dudley and the three industrial villages of Upper Gornal, Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood lie in the heart of the Black Country, itself part of the conurbation stretching from the city and suburbs of Birmingham in the east, to Wolverhampton in the north west and Stourbridge in the south west. The Gornals are situated approximately a mile and a half north-west of the town centre of Dudley.

This chapter provides a comparison between the experiences of different types of community. Dudley town centre and the Gornals were initially selected as the geographical foci, constituting two contrasting areas: the larger and socially more diverse commercial centre experiencing far more emphatically the impact of developments in retailing, leisure provision and transport as against the small, relatively (though progressively less) isolated industrial villages with predominantly working-class populations.

An appropriate definition of the spatial boundaries for 'Dudley town centre' was, however, problematic since the County Borough of Dudley incorporated a number of adjacent smaller industrial/residential communities. Parish boundaries provided a possible definition, but in the context of a study of 'popular religion' such a supply-side model seemed less than entirely appropriate. Since popular religious beliefs and practices were significantly related to the nature of local communities, it was decided instead to adopt a model based on residential rather than secular or ecclesiastical administrative patterns which might, or might not, coincide with the physical extent of residential communities.

The spatial definition adopted, and its justification, draw on a study of the borough carried out in the late 1940s by the Department of Social Science at Liverpool University.[1] The authors argued that the borough consisted of six distinct neighbourhoods, including the town centre. Four of the six areas are excluded from the study. Three of these - Netherton, Dudley Wood and Woodside - were clearly physically, socially and culturally largely independent of Dudley centre.[2] The fourth - Kate's Hill, although adjacent to the town centre to the east, was well provided with its own pubs, chapels and a parish church (St John's) and seems to have functioned as a community largely socially independent of, if economically dependent on, the town centre. The authors commented on the area's 'marked degree of independence or self-consciousness [... and] a history and an individuality of its own'.[3]

It was initially intended that this study would compare two areas: the Gornals and one of the two remaining areas identified in the report on Dudley, the town centre. The changing urban geography of the town suggested the inclusion of a third, the area identified as 'Priory Hill' in the authors' report. Slum clearance and commercial property development during the twentieth century resulted in large-scale town centre depopulation. The process was accompanied by large-scale council-house building on what was to become the Priory and Wren's Nest estates north of The Broadway. By the beginning of the Second World War the estates had become a distinct and important new residential area of the town. This area is 'split into two main sections, Priory on the one hand and Wren's Nest Estate on the other, which meet at the foot of Wren's Nest Hill'.[4] Both were composed predominantly of council housing.[5] Thus the geographical area of the study as a whole forms a compact and continuous bloc, since the

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[1] T.S. Simey, *Social Aspects of a Town Development Plan: A Study of the County Borough of Dudley* (Liverpool, 1951). Simey was Charles Booth Professor of Social Science at Liverpool University.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 35-46; *Centenary of Dudley Art Gallery, School of Art and Free Library 1884-1984* (Dudley, 1984), p. 8.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[5] Few attempts have been made to study religious beliefs and practices on council estates, except incidentally as relatively brief sections of sociological studies of life on such estates. See, for example, J.M. Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (Oxford, 1956), pp.145-

Priory and Wren's Nest Estates stretch from the north western edge of Dudley town centre to the eastern edge of Upper Gornal.

In their analysis of Dudley town centre, the authors of the development plan identified three main components. The first, the commercial centre, also included the main civic buildings, between Ednam Road and King Street on the one hand, Stafford Street and Castle Hill Road on the other. The other two were adjacent to this central area, the first extending north-west of the commercial centre and surrounding Wellington Road, the second south of King Street in the area of Flood Street.[6] Many domestic properties in these areas were destroyed in the slum clearances of the 1920s and 1930s.[7] Many of the remaining properties were scheduled for demolition by the early 1950s, and were subsequently demolished, the inhabitants being re-housed predominantly on the major housing development of the post-war years in Dudley, the Russell's Hall Estate. The two areas immediately adjacent to the commercial centre were originally the residential part of old Dudley, but by 1951 had become restricted largely to commercial purposes, though the town centre was, until the clearances of the 1930s, far more densely populated than was the case by the time this report was written.

Dudley, a market town, along with Walsall and Wednesbury, was one of three older towns in the Birmingham-Black Country conurbation which, together with the two larger commercial centres of Birmingham and Wolverhampton, had compact shopping areas. Elsewhere shops tended to follow the line of main roads.[8] This was true of Upper Gornal, the main axis of which lies along what is now the A459. Until the construction of the New Birmingham/Wolverhampton Road (now the A4123) in the 1920s, this was the main route between Dudley and Wolverhampton. Upper Gornal's shops, as well as its churches, chapels

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47. For the late twentieth century, see Peter G. Forster, 'Residual religiosity on a Hull council estate', *Sociological Review*, 37, 3 (1989), pp. 474-504.

[6] Simey, *Social Aspects*, pp. 46-7.

[7] The addresses of properties demolished in central Dudley are fully listed in the Dudley Register of Houses in Clearance Areas, 1932-1970, 7 volumes.

[8] *Conurbation: A Planning Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country by the West Midlands Group* (1948), p. 184.

and several of its pubs, were - and are - situated on Kent Street and Clarence Street which form part of this route.

By contrast, the village of Lower Gornal is distributed around a central point known as 'Five Ways'. Converging radially on this point were the routes from Upper Gornal, from the tiny Gornal sub-community of Ruiton, from Gornal Wood and from the Dibdale industrial works of the Gibbons Brothers, a major employer in the area. The few shops, the pubs and the places of worship in Lower Gornal were mainly near the central point of Five Ways. The route from Upper Gornal passed through Lower Gornal towards Gornal Wood before running to Wall Heath and formed a large part of the central axis of Gornal Wood, along which were the village's shops, several pubs and Gornal's largest Methodist chapel (Zoar).

Sedgley Urban District Council undertook only piecemeal slum clearance programmes during the inter-war years, though a report of the county medical officer in 1913 had upbraided the Council for failing to do enough and in 1919 the medical officer noted that few houses were being built in the Sedgley Urban District, commenting on the extensive problems of over-crowding and insanitary housing.[9] A site in Summer Lane, Lower Gornal, was the first to be bought and dedicated to council house construction by Sedgley Urban District Council.[10] Between the wars the District Council built one small council housing estate in Lower Gornal (Summer Lane) and one in Upper Gornal (north of Clarence Street).[11] The estates were built on open land and did not replace, but supplemented, the overcrowded old neighbourhoods, although there was some small-scale slum clearance in the 1930s, amounting to seventy-four houses.[12] On the other hand, unlike the great new council estates in Dudley, the new estates were built within the open spaces which lay between, or just on the edges of the village centres, and residents seemingly retained many of the formal and informal associations which they had

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[9] Sedgley Urban District Council Minutes, volume 13, 17 June 1913; *DH*, 31 May and 8 November 1919.

[10] *DH*, 21 June 1919.

[11] RPMSI G21, G15 and G17; WUI, G2 and G3; *DH*, 29 July 1933. The names used for interviewees throughout this study are pseudonyms.

[12] Sedgley Register of Houses in Clearance Areas, 1930-1965.

enjoyed before moving to the new estates. Miners who were moved from East Street and West Street, which were subjected to partial clearance, continued attending Lake Street chapel, for example, which was still within easy walking distance.[13] Furthermore, whilst the new Dudley estates threw together people from all parts of the Dudley borough, the new small Gornal estates were, it seems, populated almost exclusively by local people.[14]

Communication and isolation

Although only a few miles from the centre of Dudley, residents of the Gornals considered - and many still consider - themselves as quite distinct from those living in Dudley. The physical separation from the town was important. There were, however, marked differences in this respect between Upper Gornal on the one hand and Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood on the other. The route from Dudley town centre to Upper Gornal involved a relatively gentle climb of about one and a half miles and a Midland Red bus service ran along the route through Upper Gornal between Dudley and Wolverhampton.[15] Access from the village to the town was thus relatively easy. Nevertheless, if visits to Dudley became more common as the expansion of leisure facilities there became more attractive to Upper Gornal residents as the period progressed, for many people such visits remained rare, particularly in the early part of the period, representing something of a treat.[16]

Access from both Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood to the nearby town was, by foot, arduous, involving steep climbs. A bus service from Gornal Wood was in operation from some time in the 1920s,[17] but Mrs Mason, born in 1910 in Lower Gornal, recalled how much easier it was for her friends in Upper Gornal to get to Dudley, on the regular trams and buses, to attend

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[13] RPMSI, G21.

[14] For practical and methodological reasons these estates do not form a focus of this study. First, there is little documentary evidence to elucidate their history and none of the interviewee sample lived on either estate during the period covered. Second, a comparison between the surviving old and established working-class neighbourhoods of Gornal and the new estates in Dudley provides a sharp focus, which might only be obscured by any extended treatment of the Gornal council estates.

[15] *BAD*, 1925.

[16] E.g. RPMSI, G7 and G14.

meetings during the campaign of the Pentecostal evangelist, Pastor Stephen Jeffries, in 1930.[18]

The isolation of the Gornals imposed by local topography was, on the whole, reinforced by the absence of a developed communications network. The majority of railway lines in the Black Country lay to the North East of the Black Country ridge. The Gornals, lying on, or to the South West of, the ridge, never had a railway station and inherited from the nineteenth century very little in the way of a transport infrastructure.[19] The nearest railway station was Sedgley Junction to the north of the Gornals, operational until 1964.[20]

The Gornals were slightly better served by roads. The Dudley to Wolverhampton Road passed through Upper Gornal, and the Himley Road skirted the southern edge of Gornal Wood, but none went to the heart of the area.[21] It was still possible for the incumbent of St James's Lower Gornal in the 1960s to be impressed by the feeling of living in an almost hermetically sealed community, to the extent that he would recall, thirty years later, with more of a sense of the village atmosphere than of strict accuracy about the local communications network, 'it was like an island [...] and there was no road from Dudley to Upper Gornal'.[22]

Dudley was linked to the main-line railway between Birmingham and Wolverhampton by a branch shuttle service from Dudley Port, the service remaining in operation until 1967.[23] The road transport infrastructure of Dudley underwent considerable developments between 1914 and 1965. The Birmingham to Wolverhampton New Road, built in the mid-1920s, followed the eastern side of the Black Country ridge and bordered Dudley to the north.[24] In the centre of the town, road widening schemes were legion during the 1920s and 1930s and fed on

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[17] *BCB*, April 1995.
[18] RPMSI, G22.
[19] David Latham, 'A Study of Mid-Nineteenth Century Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood' (MA thesis, Wolverhampton Polytechnic, 1989).
[20] Ned Williams, *Railways of the Black Country Volume two: The Main Lines* (Wolverhampton, 1985), p. 21.
[21] David Latham, 'Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood'.
[22] Father Charles Elliott, interview with the author.
[23] Ned Williams, *Railways of the Black Country Volume two: The Main Lines* (Wolverhampton, 1985), p. 56; Harold Parsons, *Portrait of the Black Country* (1986), p. 55.
[24] Williams, *Railways of the Black Country Volume two*, p. 72. For early proposals for a new Wolverhampton to Birmingham Road, see *DH*, 9 February 1915.

the opportunities provided by slum clearance, resulting in an increased volume of traffic passing through Dudley.[25] Further increases resulted from the opening of Dudley Zoo in 1937 and road-widening schemes were undertaken to accommodate Bank Holiday traffic.[26]

Local industry and employment

The fame and name of the Black Country derive from the vital role of the region in the industrial developments of the nineteenth century. If there was no national Industrial Revolution in Britain, as some historians have argued,[27] there was certainly one in the Black Country. Fundamental to the Black Country economy in the nineteenth century were the extractive industries - coal and iron - and the manufacture of iron products.[28]

The nineteenth-century expansion of the local coal industry was almost entirely due to the exploitation of the 'Thick' or Ten Yard seam which lay less than sixty yards below the surface in the north-east of the Black Country. The locations of pits included, amongst other places, Dudley and Sedgley.[29] Iron-founding trades followed from the extraction and iron production industries, and Dudley was amongst those areas that were noted for certain iron products.[30] In some partly-agricultural villages like the Gornals, which failed to benefit from the newer heavy industries, hand-wrought nailing in small domestic workshops remained a major form of employment into the late nineteenth century.[31] Limestone, needed as a flux in the blast-furnaces and for building and agricultural purposes, was mined from the hills between Dudley and Sedgley, and was still mined from the Wren's Nest hill until several years after

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[25] *BAD* (1927). Blocksidge provides details annually of the progress of road widening schemes in Dudley throughout the 1920s and much of the 1930s.

[26] *BAD* (1937 and 1938); Chandler and Hannah, *Dudley As it was and as it is Today*, p. 175.

[27] Michael Fores, 'The Myth of a British Industrial Revolution', *History*, 66 (1981), pp. 181-98.

[28] Trevor J. Raybould, *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate* (Newton Abbot, 1973); G.C. Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1927* (1966).

[29] John Benson, *British Coalminers In the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (1989), pp. 19-21. The other two coalfields classified by Benson as 'middle-ranking' were East and West Scotland. There were five major coalfields: the North East, Lancashire and Cheshire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and South Wales; Allen, *Industrial Development*, p. 87; Raybould, *Economic Emergence of the Black Country*.

[30] Allen, *Industrial Development*, p. 22.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 75; Latham, 'Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood'.

World War II.[32] An outcrop of sandstone around Upper and Lower Gornal had been quarried since the seventeenth century and remained an important component of the local economy into the nineteenth century and beyond.[33]

The twentieth century was a period of marked industrial change for the region. The experiences of the town of Dudley and the industrial villages of Gornal were, however, significantly different. In some ways continuity - industrial as well as in other respects - was a feature of the Gornals. In other ways - particularly in the case of coal-mining - the Gornals experienced a period of growth for much of the period whilst mining in Dudley dwindled to insignificant proportions.

The origins of these changes lay in the second half of the nineteenth century. By this time the coal seams of many of the Black Country's pits were reaching exhaustion point or suffering from decreasing profitability owing to flooding. Employees in the mines of South Staffordshire and Worcestershire in 1865 numbered 25,000; by 1913 this figure had dropped to 10,000 and by 1926 had fallen further to 6,500.[34] As table 1 shows, the output of coal from the Black Country during this period was halved and continued to drop throughout the period under study, whilst the production of ironstone also dropped dramatically and the local ironstone-mining industry was non-operational by 1950.

Table 1: Coal and Ironstone output in the Black Country, 1872 - 1950[35]

	Coal (tons)	Ironstone (tons)
1872	9,000,000	642,000
1887	6,000,000	110,000
1900	4,500,000	51,000
1913	3,000,000	32,000
1950	900,000	Nil

[32] Allen, *Industrial Development*, p. 87; *VCH: A History of the County of Stafford*, Vol.2 (OUP, 1967), p. 197; B.L.C. Johnson and M.J. Wise, 'The Black Country 1800-1950', in R.H. Kinvig, J.G. Smith and M.J. Wise (eds.), *Birmingham and its Regional Setting; A Scientific Survey* (Birmingham, 1950), pp. 229-48 (p. 232).

[33] *History of the County of Stafford*, pp. 191-92.

[34] Raybould, *Economic Emergence of the Black Country*, p. 212; Allen, *Industrial Development*, pp. 278-80, 385; A.J. Taylor, 'Coal', *Victoria County History of Staffordshire 2*, eds. M.W. Greenslade and J.G. Jenkins (Oxford, 1967), p. 77; Benson, *British Coalminers*, p. 20.

[35] Raybould, *Economic Emergence of the Black Country*, p. 171.

Table 2: Occupational sectors employing more than 5% of all working males (M) and females (F) over the age of 14, Sedgley (including the Gornals) 1911-1951[36]

	1911	1911	1921	1921	1931	1931	1951	1951
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Brick/tile-making	5.5	?	3.1	21.2	1.9	?	2.4	?
Building	14.7		11.7		12.0		10.2	
Clerical		?		5.6		7.7		21.0
Commerce and finance	3.4	?	5.0	11.1	6.9	11.1	7.9	13.8
Iron, steel/other metals/engineering	14.6	?	19.6	7.2	19.0	?	25.0	9.2
Labourers/unskilled various	2.3	?	7.3	2.1	14.7	13.6	9.5	13.0
Mining/quarrying	25.5		29.4		17.1		9.9	
Personal/domestic service		32.9		16.6		15.4		15.1
Professional/technical	1.8	6.7	1.3	5.9	1.6	5.2	6.3	9.0
Textiles, clothing		44.7		20.0		20.0		10.3
Transport	6.8		5.1		5.6		5.1	
Total number of employed adults	*4564*	*1174*	*5462*	*1953*	*6319*	*2634*	*7597*	*3011*

The Gornals, in the south-west of the coalfield, were amongst the few parts of the Black Country in which coal-mining remained a major source of employment beyond the inter-War years. In Dudley (Table 3), mining and quarrying declined from nearly 12% of the male workforce in 1911 to just 2% by 1951. In Sedgley (Table 2), mining and quarrying grew from just over a quarter to just under 30% of the male workforce between 1911 and 1921, before declining sharply to 17% by 1931 and further to just under 10% by 1951.

Table 3: Occupational sectors employing more than 5% of all working males (M) and females (F) over the age of 14, Dudley 1911-1951[37]

	1911	1911	1921	1921	1931	1931	1951	1951
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Building	6.5		4.3		6.2		5.9	
Clerical		?		9.0		10.5		17
Commerce and finance	5.2	2.9	6.9	11.7	8.9	12.9	6.6	11.8
Iron, steel/other metals/engineering	36.5	15	35.7	16.9	29.7	16.9	33.8	11
Labourers/unskilled various	7	3.2	8.8	2.4	16.5	9.4	13.5	13.2
Mining/quarrying	11.9		9.0		5.7		2.0	
Personal/domestic service		30		19.6		19.7		16.5
Professional/technical		7.3		7.1		4.9		5.4
Textiles, clothing		25		14.6		15.3		10.6
Transport	9.1		8.4		7.8		6.8	
Total number of employed adults	*16036*	*5235*	*17896*	*6368*	*19589*	*7428*	*21044*	*8907*

[36] Decennial Censuses, 1911-1951. Between 1921 and 1951 there were very few changes in the Registrar General's classification of occupations between 1921 and 1951. Changes between 1911 and 1921 make comparisons between pre- and post-World War I tentative. Figures for 1961 are not provided since the relevant published report - *Census, 1961, England and Wales: Socio-Economic Group Tables* (1966) - gave occupational tables only by large regions, with statistics for sub-districts such as Sedgley summarised into categories so broad as to make comparison with earlier years impossible.

[37] Decennial Censuses, 1911-1951.

The villages of Gornal were beneficiaries of the shift of gravity of the Black Country coalfield to the South West, as the Thick Coal measures in the North East were exhausted. By 1902, Himley collieries, just west of the Gornals, were the largest in the coalfield employing more than seven hundred men.[38] During the twentieth century concealed seams were exploited, requiring deeper pits. The biggest and longest lasting of these was Baggeridge Colliery, to the west of Gornal. The property of the Earl of Dudley, the first shaft was sunk some time in the 1890s and by 1914 around 1750 men were employed at the colliery.[39] When Baggeridge closed in 1967, the last pit in the Black Country, 550 men were laid off.[40] For most of our period, however, Baggeridge was far from being the only pit in the Gornal district. The Earl of Dudley owned a number of smaller pits in and around Gornal, and several more were run by local industrialists and even, in a few often short-lived ventures, by penny capitalist former butty-colliers.[41]

The Gornals were far from being wholly dependent upon the coal industry. Nor, it seems, were the three villages characterised by the same employment structure. Although the census does not allow for any disaggregation of the three villages,[42] oral evidence suggests that many Upper Gornal residents, living on the main route between Dudley and Wolverhampton, travelled to work in one or other of these towns.[43] Land use in Upper Gornal was almost entirely residential, with no major industrial sites. In Lower Gornal, by contrast, the Gibbons (Dudley) Limited and the related Gibbons Brothers works, both on Dibdale Lane, and founded

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[38] Angus Dunphy, *Coal Mining in and around Gornal* (Dudley, 1977), p. 8.

[39] Dunphy, *Coal Mining*, p. 100; R. Newnham, 'The Sinking of Baggeridge Colliery', *The Black Countryman*, volume 1, no. 1 (1970), pp. 21-3.

[40] Dunphy, *Coal Mining*, pp. 135-36.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-102; Archie Williams, 'Coal Mining in "The Straits" Lower Gornal', *The Black Countryman*, 11, No.2 (Spring 1978), pp. 6-11. Pit-owners included such men as the owner of the local refractory equipment manufacturers, Gibbons of Dibdale Lane, Fred Allen, owner of the local steelworks, Mr Fithern, local landowner, Tory councillor during the inter-war years and Sunday School Superintendent at Mount Zion United Methodist chapel in Upper Gornal (Dunphy, *Coal Mining*, pp. 30-102; RPMSI, G7). For the concept of 'penny capitalism', see John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 1-6

[42] They are all subsumed within the statistics for the Urban District of Sedgley.

[43] RPMSI, G17 and G7.

in the early and late nineteenth century respectively, were major industrial sites, providing employment for many local men in brick-making, metal trades and engineering.[44] Also in Lower Gornal was the firm of Alfred Allen and Son, founded in 1899, manufacturer of colliery equipment, another major employer of Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood residents.[45]

Between Lower and Upper Gornal the tiny community of Ruiton had, to a large extent, its own micro-economy and was dominated by two basic types of industry: quarrying of local stone and itinerant trading or 'hawking' of salt and small metalwares. Ruiton hawkers toured the Midlands each year between Spring and Autumn selling metal tools to farmers, before returning to Ruiton for the winter months.[46] The women of the 'Ruiton Salt Folk' were recognised around the Black Country both by their distinctive dress (a shawl and a unique type of bonnet) and were regarded by many as a breed apart, [47] gypsy-like and with their own distinctive dialect.[48]

The Ruiton hawkers were reputed to be careful with their money and comfortably off. Still richer pickings were to be had by a few from the quarrying of local stone between Lower Gornal and Ruiton, mainly to the east and west of Holloway Street, ownership of the quarries being restricted to a handful of families. An outcrop of sandstone had been quarried since the seventeenth century, and the average annual output of Gornal stone by the end of the period remained around 18,000 tons.[49] Each quarry employed only a handful of people, but provided a good income for their owners. Stone was sold either for building or, more commonly by the twentieth century, for sale to local industry for use in, for example, the refractory industry.[50]

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[44] *VCH, Stafford, Volume 2*, p. 270; *Dudley: The Official Handbook* (1929), p. 45; *Sedgley: The Official Guide* (1923), p. 53; RPMSI, G17.

[45] *Dudley: The Official Handbook*, p. 50; *Kelly's Directory for Staffordshire*, 1912, 1916, 1921, 1924, 1928, 1932 and 1936.

[46] e.g. RPMSI, G14, a daughter of a member of one of the main families of Ruiton hawkers. See also *BCB*, February 1982 for the origins of the Ruiton salt-sellers.

[47] Mrs Childs described the 'Ruitoners' as 'a different race', whilst Mr Hudson, an immigrant to Gornal emphasised their gypsy characteristics (RPMSI, G7; RPMS G17); see also *BCB*, February, August and November 1977.

[48] *BCB*, February 1977.

[49] *VCH, Stafford, Volume 2*, pp. 191-92.

[50] RPMSI, G14.

The First World War was a period of high levels of employment and good wages in Gornal, dependent as it was largely on coal-mining, engineering and metal trades.[51] Whilst Baggeridge survived the economic vicissitudes of the 1920s and early 1930s, however, many of the smaller pits did not and the Gornals, like other parts of the Black Country, suffered poverty and high levels of unemployment during the inter-war years.[52] Mr Williamson, who started working down the pit in Gornal in 1917, aged 13, recalled that those who still had jobs in the pits after the 1921 strike and lockout[53] returned to work on lower pay, whilst many of the smaller local pits, including those owned by the Earl of Dudley, were not re-opened, being considered uneconomic as a result of deterioration during the enforced closure. Many, according to Mr Williamson, went to work either at Baggeridge, in local brick-making firms or in the local iron industry.[54] By 1924, between 300 and 400 local miners were being transported by lorry on a daily basis from Gornal to the new pits in Huntington, near Cannock, of the expanding Lyttleton Colliery Company.[55] Further pit closures resulted from the 1926 General Strike, forcing young men to seek work as far afield as Yorkshire.[56] It is clear from Tables 2 and 3, however, that in Gornal as in Dudley, the inter-war years witnessed a marked growth in the percentage of the male workforce engaged in unskilled labour. As Mr Williamson recalled, 'you had to take whatever you could get'.[57]

By 1931 male unemployment in Sedgley had reached thirteen per cent (nearly a thousand men),[58] and during the early 1930s concern for unemployed members of church congregations was expressed in parish magazines.[59] Several Gornal interviewees recalled their

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[51] WUI, G1.
[52] See Stephen Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain between the Wars* (1980); C.L. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940* (1957), chapter 9.
[53] For the 1921 dispute, see Barry Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry Volume 4 1913-1946: The Political Economy of Decline* (1987).
[54] WUI, G1.
[55] *DH*, 16 February 1924.
[56] RPMSI, G7.
[57] WUI, G1.
[58] *Census, 1931, Classification of Occupations* (1934), p. 523.
[59] e.g. St Peter's Upper Gornal Parish Church Council Minutes, Volume II, 1931-42, magazine insert May 1932.

fathers suffering extended periods of unemployment during the late 1920s and early 1930s,[60] but the problem of poverty extended beyond those families affected by unemployment to those who suffered the effects of short-time working. Archie Williams, a Gornal coal merchant born in 1903, recalled that the huge overproduction of coal resulted in many local miners working only two to three days per week on low wages during the depression years of the 1920s and early 1930s. Nor was it only workers in the coal industry who suffered. Mr Hudson noted that Zoar chapel in Gornal Wood in the 1920s and 1930s included in its congregation a number of local managers, including the contract manager for the local firm of Gibbons in Dibdale Lane:

> Bricklayers used to assemble outside the Zoar on a Sunday morning [...] because the contract manager for Gibbons attended Zoar chapel [...] And they would wait there to see if he could offer them any work on the Monday.[61]

The results of short-time working and unemployment spread out into the wider community as wives were forced to resort to such desperate measures as asking for scraps from the local butcher on the pretence that they were for the family dog,[62] or to ask for goods 'on the strap' (i.e. credit), moving from shop to shop, with the result that some local traders found themselves in financial difficulties.[63] Mrs Childs recalled that the years following the First World War were years of 'pinching' (i.e. scrimping) and so difficult that some people could not even afford a pair of shoes in which to send their children to school.[64] Poaching from the Earl of Dudley's Himley Estate, or buying from poachers, became a common means of securing meat,[65] whilst children of the poorest families stole vegetables from fields in front of the Burton Road Hospital.[66]

By the second half of the 1930s, the Gornal villages, like other parts of the country, were recovering and beginning to enjoy a period of relative prosperity, and the Second World

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[60] e.g. RPMSI, G22, G23 and G2.
[61] RPMSI, G17.
[62] RPMSI, G23.
[63] *BCB*, February 1979 and March 1989.
[64] RPMSI, G7. One boy in her class at Robert Street school, when his shoes were inspected by the teacher, was found to have been walking to school for months with only the upper of the shoe intact.
[65] *BCB*, March 1989
[66] RPMSI, G23. Cf. Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1981); *Idem*, 'Steal to Survive: the Social Crime of Working Class Children', *Oral History Journal*, ix (1981), pp. 24-35.

War reinforced the activities of local industry.[67] The early post-war years, a period of prosperity nationally, were, it would seem, also kind to the Gornals. By 1951, there were only around 130 unemployed men in the Sedgley district, and a large majority continued to work in the metal and engineering trades, as Table 2 indicates. Only the local coal industry had suffered a significant drop from 17% of the local male workforce in 1931 to 10% in 1951, from 1083 to 751 men, most of the remaining miners by this time working at Baggeridge, as many more of the local small pits were exhausted or abandoned. Only the 'professional/technical' sector grew markedly, from just 1.6% of the male workforce before the War to 6.3% by 1951, a development which was reflected in the changes in social constituency and leadership of some of the Gornal Methodist chapels in the post-war years.[68]

The local economy of Sedgley was not, however, totally dependent upon the male workforce at any time during the period. A considerable, and growing, number of local women also took paid employment. The proportion of women of an employable age in recorded paid employment grew from, at the least, approximately 22% in 1911 to 35.5% in 1921 and 37.6% in 1931 before falling slightly by 1951 to 32%.[70] During the difficult years of the 1920s and 1930s, many local women had to seek work in order to supplement the meagre incomes of the men. Mrs Mason, for example, recalled the difficulties her brother faced finding employment in the years after World War I, but added that, having finished school, she was lucky enough to secure a job immediately at Grainger and Smith's tailoring firm in Dudley.[71] Mrs Childs, the

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[67] RPMSI, G17.

[68] See chapter 6.

[69] It must be noted that any calculation from census figures is likely to be an under-estimation, given the commonly accepted problem of omission of women's work in census returns.

[70] Figures calculated from the total numbers of women of an employable age (over 14): *Census of England and Wales, 1911: County of Stafford* (1914), p. 33; *Census of England and Wales, 1921: County of Stafford* (1923), p. 88; *Census of England and Wales, 1931: Classification of Occupations* (1934), p. 523; *Census of England and Wales, 1951: Classification of Occupations* (1951), pp. 424-25. It must be noted that any calculation from census figures is likely to be an under-estimation, given the commonly accepted problem of omission of women's work in census returns.

[71] RPMSI, G22.

last of a family of thirteen, also had to seek work as soon as she left school in the late 1920s, working at several textile factories in Gornal and Dudley.[72]

The textiles and clothing industry was the greatest source of female employment between 1911 and the Second World War in the Gornals. Cheap tailoring - particularly the production of men's trousers - was a cottage industry in Gornal from the 1880s up to World War II. Many houses had a sewing machine and local women were supplied by factors with cut out material, finished goods then being transported to Dudley. Indeed, women's sewing work between the wars probably reinforced communal ties with functional divisions of labour between different women, and children running errands as go-betweens. Mr Latham of Lower Gornal, recalling such errands among his childhood duties in the 1920s and early 1930s, noted the importance of women's work in local family economies, due to unemployment and to large families:

> In our area there was a lot of sewing done, and when the men couldn't work the women would work and this lady [...] used to do the finishing off of trousers. Another lady [...], her husband had no job and they had a large family of six [...] Lilly would say I want you to go down to 44 Brookdale and I'd come home from school and run down [...] and fetch the trousers [...] And I would take the parcel up to Lilly's. She [Mrs Jones] had all the material cut at Grainger and Smith's. I'd take it up to Auntie Lilly's and she'd do all the finishing off then back down again to Mrs Jones and she'd take it to Grainger and Smith's and then get paid.[73]

During the Second World War, Clifford Williams and Son Ltd (Clothing) of Tipton took over small warehouses in Louise Street, Gornal Wood, in order to draw on the reputed skills of Gornal machinists. There Gornal women continued to find employment locally, if no longer in their own homes, until a new central site was bought in Tipton a few years after World War II.[74]

Local women's work was not restricted to the textiles industries. Below the coal seam lay rich fireclay deposits.[75] By 1952, there were still 3 fireclay mines, and one open-cast

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[72] RPMSI, G7. I am grateful to Mrs Childs for allowing me to take a photocopy of her manuscript autobiography, which provides details of her employment (pp. 19-22) [a copy of this autobiography is in the possession of the author].

[73] RPMSI, G23.

[74] Archie Williams, 'The Gornal Basket Carriage', *BCB*, April 1992.

[75] Dunphy, *Coal Mining*, pp. 5 and 70-2; Allen, *Industrial Development*, pp. 8 and 280.

working in the Gornals.[76] As a consequence, brick-making was a further source of local employment, and women a source of cheap labour for employers, as at one local brickmakers, Gibbons, where they were expected to mould a thousand bricks in a day, still a recognised 'stint' into the 1960s.[77] Many, however, walked to brickyards and tile manufacturers in Pensnett, approximately a mile and a half to the south of Gornal Wood. Mrs Wesley of Lower Gornal, whose father was a coalminer, referred to the low wages and strikes which made the miners' income modest and uncertain as the context for her mother's work as a brickmaker at Corbyn's Hall in Pensnett both before and, for a short time, after her marriage.[78] The wages which women received for work at such firms were reputedly meagre, but evidently important.[79] As Mrs Wesley observed, 'there was only that, tailoring and service, no choices really'.[80]

As Table 2 indicates, service was the other main opportunity for local women, particularly before World War I. Locally there were opportunities for service with the Earl of Dudley (at Himley Hall) as well as with the local middle class and at hotels and public houses. Mrs Fletcher's mother's career path epitomises the opportunities for women up to 1939:

> Mother worked in sewing in Birmingham first then in service at the top of Lloyd Hill, a place called the Foxlands [Penn, Wolverhampton] and she liked that, she said she was like a lady. It was a Brigadier living there. She married in 1938. After that she worked in the brickyard - Noman's Brickyard in Pensnett.[81]

It is clear, however, that despite a national trend of continued growth in the sector in the inter-war years,[82] service declined as a form of female employment locally from 33% in 1911 to just over 15% by 1931. By contrast, Sedgley followed the national trend of growth in female

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[76] *VCH, Stafford, Volume 2*, p. 271.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 270. See also, for example, *BCB*, October 1991.

[78] RPMSI, G30. Cf. RPMSI, G26.

[79] Mr Latham stated that wages for women in the brickyards were about 30s per week, whilst Mrs Scott, who lived on the Priory Estate in Dudley until she married and worked at Noman's yard from the age of 16 then having been widowed at a young age in 1934 worked at Gibbons brickyard until World War II, stated that she earned 27/1 per week. This was certainly considerably lower than national average weekly wages in engineering (55s), or coalmining (45s) or even agricultural labouring (35s) in 1935 (Benson, *Working Class*, Table 4, p. 41).

[80] RPMSI, G30.

[81] RPMSI, G10. For others whose mothers were in service in local pubs, middle-class homes or, in Mr Beech's case, with the Earl of Dudley (both mother and father), see RPMSI, G5, G22 and G23.

[82] P. Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers - Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service between the Wars', in J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson (eds.), *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (1979), pp. 121-39.

employment in the commercial and clerical sectors throughout the period.[83] As Table 2 indicates, these two sectors together made up over one third of all female employment amongst Sedgley residents by 1951.

Male employment in Dudley was, as Table 3 indicates, dominated throughout the period by the metal and engineering trades. By 1914, coalmining had already declined to under 12% of the male workforce and continued to decline during the inter-war and post-war years. The only other sectors to employ more than 5% of the male workforce at any time between 1911 and 1951 were building, commerce and finance and transport, none of them experiencing any marked growth or decline.

The exhaustion of the region's natural resources forced Dudley's metal industry to change from the production of primary products to finished or semi-finished articles from the mid-nineteenth century.[84] By the mid-twentieth century the industrial base of Dudley revolved around light, rather than heavy, industry with a preponderance of general engineering firms.[85] During the inter-war years two-thirds or more of workers in Dudley and Sedgley were employed in seven industries as classified by the Ministry of Labour and National Service: building and decorating; constructional engineering; other metal industries; bricks, pipes, tiles and other fireclay goods; mining; tailoring; and retail distribution. By 1946 general engineering (now distinct from metal industries), motor vehicles,[86] cycles and aircraft and local government had also become important. In 1946 74% of workers in Dudley and Sedgley were engaged in these ten industries.[87]

The economic fortunes of the town waxed and waned considerably during the period under study. The First World War brought a period of relative prosperity to Dudley with war-

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[83] Benson, *Working Class*, pp. 24-5; Martin Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History 1870-1992* (1994), pp. 266-67.

[84] Allen, *Industrial Development*, *passim*.

[85] G. Chandler and I.C. Hannah, *Dudley As it was and as it is To-day* (1949), pp. 89-94.

[86] For a short period, Dudley had enjoyed the prospect of becoming a centre of one of the twentieth century's boom industries: the automobile industry. In 1919 J. Harper Bean began manufacturing motor cars on the east side of the town centre, but production ceased in 1929 (Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 58).

[87] Simey, *Social Aspects*, p.52. As a note in the report states, the Local Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service covered both the Borough of Dudley and Sedgley Urban District so that it is impossible to obtain separate statistics on employment for Dudley alone for years between the censuses.

time industries providing a higher employment rate than had been characteristic of the thirty years preceding the war.[88] Many Black Country firms were well-positioned to turn to the manufacture of military hardware. A few were specially built for war-time production.[89] The inter-war period, however, continued and exacerbated the pre-war trends.[90] Along with several other Black Country towns, Dudley suffered acutely during the 1920s and early 1930s, when the heavy iron and steel trades nationally were particularly depressed.[91] By 1931, unemployment in Dudley was greater even than in South Wales, peaking at over 41% of the total insured population and the average unemployment rate in Dudley (including Sedgley) for the years 1931-38 was 21.6%, as against a national average of 16.9%.[92]

The poverty engendered by such high levels of unemployment was at its most noticeable in the town centre area of Dudley where, until the slum clearances of the 1930s, courts and alleys, together with temporary housing built during the First World War, provided poor quality accommodation for the town's poorest residents. Mrs Cash recalled children from Flood Street, in the parish of St Edmund's where she attended Sunday School in the late 1920s and 1930s, whose clothes were so ragged that they had to present themselves at a local house of correction in order to borrow clothes to attend Sunday School each week.[93]

Unemployment in Dudley fell in the second half of the 1930s. By 1937 unemployment in the town had fallen to 9.3%, and by the time of the 1951 census a mere 340 men were recorded as unemployed, just 1.6% of the adult male population.[94] Mr Lewis, a child living on the Wren's Nest Estate in the 1930s, vividly recalled the contrast between the pre- and post-war eras:

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[88] See, for example, *DH*, 17 April 1915, which notes that since the beginning of the War only £50 had been distributed out of the local Prince of Wales Relief Fund (consisting of subsidies from staff of local large firms and intended for the relief of distress arising from the War), since 'employment on the whole has been so good'. See also Allen, *Industrial Development*, pp. 373-79.

[89] E.g. the National Projectile Factory ('The Nash'); information from 'The Black Country and the Great War (1914-1918)', an exhibition held at Dudley Art Gallery, March to September 1996; Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 57

[90] *Conurbation*, pp. 113-15.

[91] See Constantine, *Unemployment*, pp. 5-22; Allen, *Industrial Development*, pp. 382-84.

[92] *Conurbation*, p. 121-23 and p. 125. The 1931 national unemployment average in 1931 was 21.3%; Pugh, *State and Society*, p. 167; Simey, *Social Aspects*, Table III, p. 55.

[93] RPMSI, D6.

[94] *Conurbation*, p. 123; *Census, 1951: Classification of Occupations*, p. 319.

After the War people had money, there was jobs about. Before the War you had the Depression, people hardly had any money, struggling to make ends meet [...] After the War, when the world had been flattened and had got to be rebuilt, of course the work was about and the money was about.[95]

As in Gornal, a significant number of women took paid employment throughout the period. In 1911 30.5% of women over the age of 14 were recorded as being in paid employment. By 1921 the figure had risen very slightly to 30.9% and further to 33% by 1931. By 1951, 36.1% of Dudley women over the age of 15 were in paid employment. The greatest sources of female employment in Dudley were personal (including domestic) service, clothing and textiles work and metal work. All three, however, declined in importance, whilst the proportion of women employed in the clerical and retailing sectors grew.[96]

Community Life in the Gornals, Dudley town centre and the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates

The Gornals, at the beginning of the period, were overwhelmingly working-class villages. In 1919, the medical officer, Dr McMillan, reported that Sedgley Urban District contained 3,349 houses, of which 3,166 were workmen's dwellings with rentals of up to 5s per week.[97] Thus, fewer than 200 properties in the villages (around 5%) were inhabited by non-working-class residents, at a time when the working class formed just over 78% of the population.[98]

Just outside the village, to the west, was Himley Hall, the seat of the Earls of Dudley until 1948.[99] The grandest property in Gornal itself was Ellowes Hall built by a nineteenth-century ironmaster.[100] In its own estate to the west of Ruiton, it was insulated from contact with the village, though during the late nineteenth century it seems that the owner had engaged in some small-scale paternalism.[101] During the twentieth century Ellowes Hall was inhabited by a

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[95] RPMSI, D21.

[96] For female employment in Dudley in 1949 - highlighting the primary importance of the distributive, the clothing and the engineering and metal trades - see Simey, *Social Aspects*, pp. 73-5.

[97] *DH*, 8 November 1919.

[98] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), p. 106; *Census of England and Wales, 1911: County of Stafford* (1914), pp. 80-1; *Census of England and Wales, 1921: County of Stafford* (1923), p. 88.

[99] Chandler and Hannah, *Dudley*, p. 48. For an annual fete held at Himley Hall, see F.A Barnett, *The Story of a Village* (1973), p. 29; *BCB*, November 1975; RPMSI, G5.

[100] Underhill, *The Story of the Ancient Manor of Sedgley*, pp. 442-43; *BCB*, November 1989.

[101] RPMSI, G7.

succession of wealthy industrialists and landowners and there is no evidence of any relationship with the local community during this period beyond that of providing some domestic employment.

Some local businessmen, like the Gibbons contract manager between the Wars, moved out of the villages to more desirable areas like Stourbridge,[102] but most, it seemed, stayed in the area, particularly in Sedgley, which was rather better provided with substantial properties than Gornal. The residences of this small number of wealthy local businessmen and professionals were scattered around the villages. The Allen family, a local manufacturer of mining equipment, for example, had a large house in Lake Street, Lower Gornal, though the great majority of the houses on the street were workmen's houses, whilst Dr McMillan lived in Prospect House, Clarence Street, Upper Gornal which also consisted mainly of small working-class terraces.[103] Similarly, Humphrey Street, Lower Gornal, consisted mainly of small terraced housing but also a few larger houses including the impressive 'Lyndhurst', home to a member of the Allen family at the beginning of the period and to a local doctor by the 1930s.[104]

The fifty years covered by the period, however, witnessed an increase in the proportion of middle-class residents within the Sedgley district as a whole. By 1961 the proportion of Sedgley's population engaged in manual labour had fallen to around 63%.[105] The absence of any systematic local breakdown by social class in earlier censuses makes the identification of the chronology of change problematic, but a crude count, converting occupational groupings into classes, would suggest that the rate of change accelerated markedly in the post-War years. Whilst in 1931, the middle class for the whole of the Sedgley district remained as low as between 15 and 20% of the local population, by 1951 the figure had risen to around 25%.[106]

It is impossible to disaggregate the Gornal from the Sedgley census figures, but it seems from other sources that a significant part of this middle-class growth in the Sedgley

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[102] RPMSI, G17.
[103] RPMSI, G21; Kelly, *Directory of Staffordshire* (1916).
[104] Kelly, *Directory of Staffordshire* (1916); RPMSI, G21.
[105] *Census, 1961, Socio-Economic Group Tables* (1966), p. 37. For the problems in defining class by occupation and for a broader helpful discussion of definitions of class, see Arthur Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA Since 1930* (1980), especially pp. 13 and 62-3.
[106] *Census, 193, Classification of Occupations* (1934), p. 523; *Census, 1951: Classification of Occupations* (1951), pp. 424-5.

district must be attributed to the growing popularity of Sedgley as a middle-class commuter village in the post-war years.[107] This development was far more clearly a feature of Sedgley than of the Gornal villages which almost certainly did not experience anything like the same rate of middle-class growth. Nevertheless, the evidence of oral testimony and of returns to a questionnaire distributed by the author suggests that there was a not insignificant (though unquantifiable) degree of upward mobility in Gornal families in the post-War years, not least amongst families associated with the churches and chapels.

There also existed within the villages throughout the period, however, differences in standards of living *within* the working class and some who, by dint of small-scale business activities, had raised themselves into a social bracket recognised within the villages as 'different'. In Bird Street, Gornal Wood, there were (and are) houses which, although still terraced, were large, well-built and beyond the pocket of miners, for example.[108] Some of the houses on Temple Street, Lower Gornal, were also larger terraces, the 'entries' (passages between the houses providing access to the rear) being large enough for a horse and cart.[109] By contrast, some of the poorer working class - and particularly the local coalminers - lived in two-up-two-down cramped and poor quality terraces. West Street and East Street off Redhall Road in Lower Gornal, in particular, were made up of such properties and inhabited by miners.[110]

Despite such differences, oral evidence strongly suggests that the existence of a small number of local industries employing large numbers of men reinforced the coherence of the local community in Gornal. But a sense of community was sustained more importantly in a number of other ways within the villages: in streets, neighbourhoods and kinship networks, in certain pubs and clubs, and within particular chapels.

In the Gornals, familial relationships consolidated the community of geophysical intimacy. The former was partly the product of the extensive family networks which characterised Gornal society throughout the whole of the period from 1914-65.[111] Large

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[107] Raybould, *Economic Emergence of the Black Country*, p. 125.
[108] RPMSI, G17; RPMSI, G21.
[109] RPMSI, G21.
[110] RPMSI, G21; WUI, G4.
[111] Cf. David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 31-2.

families remained common and co-residence or physical propinquity within the villages served to reinforce the importance of familial bonds. Families were frequently large and grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins often lived within the same street, group of streets or village.[112] On a day-to-day basis, children were instructed to run errands for aunts and uncles, undertake cleaning in the home or look after younger children.[113] The duties of parents during the inter-war years often extended into the married lives of their off-spring. In her autobiography Mrs Childs observed of her older brother's marriage in 1920:

> It was a struggle for Mom because Mom was the one who had to find the bed and table and chairs for them. Also the little house at the top of Lady's Row next to Aunt Polly and Uncle Jes Porter. My Mom did washing and looked after my brother's wife when she had the baby.[114]

In some cases, a child might be brought up by a relative living very near the parental home. Mrs Jones, for example, born in 1941 in Lower Gornal, had a total of twelve aunts and uncles on both sides of her family, eleven of whom lived in Gornal or Sedgley. One of her father's brothers lived with his mother next door to Mrs Jones's parents, and having been sent to stay with her uncle and grandmother whilst her sister was being born she remained there until she was about 25 years old.[115]

Whilst co-residence under a single roof was largely restricted to the nuclear family of parents and children, grandparents living near to the parental home were frequently involved in short-term care, whilst aunts and, to a lesser extent uncles, helped out when needed and provided moral supervision of their nephews and nieces.[116] Parents who were irregular attenders

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[112] Mrs Childs, for example, was 'the one the baker threw in' in a family of 13. Only 5 survived, but all remained living locally for most or all of their lives. Such proximity could, and sometimes did, result in family tensions and mistrust, but more usually generated a family structure which, reinforced by the common custom of leaving doors unlocked and open, approximated more to a form of extended rather than nuclear family. Mrs Childs recalled her ignorance of the function of a key when she moved from Pale Peace to Tudor Place in 1928 (RPMSI, G6).

[113] Mrs Childs, autobiography [untitled], p. 2

[114] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[115] RPMSI, G19.

[116] The moral supervision of certain relatives, more zealously religious than their charges (or even the parents), was sometimes deeply resented: e.g. RPMSI, G9. A number of interviewees were either 'granny-reared' themselves or stated that one or other of their parents were, e.g. Mr Slater, born in

at church or chapel, for example, were happy to entrust their children to relatives who took them to services and Sunday School.[117]

The precise nature of the family relationship was not always clear, sometimes apparently being assumed solely on the evidence of a shared surname. The familial nature of community relationships was, however, reinforced by observance of the helpful and friendly practices of good-neighbourliness. Mr Latham recalled:

> There was a family in the street on the opposite side to where we lived and there lived Granny and Grandad Brookes and I understand that he was distant cousin to my grandfather, possibly cousins, definitely a friendly relationship with the family. They used to come into each others' houses [...] Granny Brookes was remembered affectionately because whenever there was anybody in trouble, Granny Brookes would be the first on the scene [...] so therefore Granny Brookes was known affectionately by anybody in the street.[118]

The intimacy and nomenclature of familial relationships were also in many cases extended to non-relations. Mrs Childs recalled her childhood in the 1910s and 20s as a time populated by 'Aunts' and 'Uncles', the majority of whom were not blood-relations, such titles being most commonly granted to those who lived in the same small street.[119] Such was the perceived importance of familial ties that this verbal extension of the family was sometimes developed into a form of surrogacy, with assumed 'family' ties compensating for the emotional privations which resulted from unemployment and poverty-induced migration of family members or of the financial inability to look after infants.[120] Neighbourliness was defined in pre-War Gornal by a clear code. Good neighbours were those who monitored each other's households for any signs of change or disturbance.[121]

1926, had 5 sisters and was sent to be brought up by his mother's mother in Gornal, though his parents by then lived in Dudley centre (RPMSI, D26).

[117] e.g. RPMSI, G21.

[118] RPMSI, G21.

[119] RPMSI, G6. The street concerned was Pale Street in Upper Gornal, at the time known as 'Pale Peace', a name used by locals, according to Mrs Childs, owing to the harmony enjoyed by residents on the street.

[120] E.g. RPMSI, G21.

[121] Cf. Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, rev. edn. (Harmondsworth, 1962), and Standish Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Class 1890-1914* (1977), p. 59.

Childbirth was, for many, a time when such support was needed and the services of neighbours to look after older children for a short period were often called upon.[122] Neighbourly assistance was also extended during times of sickness. Mrs Childs' mother provided assistance when a friend's neighbour's infant children were sick, although her account implies that under normal circumstances assistance in such cases was expected from the extended family:

> Mrs Hartill who lived in the next yard to my Mom's friend Mrs Millington had twins [...] they were taken very ill. My Mom used to be back and forth night and day if she was wanted, because Mrs Hartill's mother-in-law was very poorly with chest trouble and could not help [...] when the baby girl died we mourned that baby as our own.[123]

The depression years between the wars provided the greatest need and the greatest opportunity for mutual neighbourly assistance. Mrs Childs' account provides a vivid image of poverty-induced suffering and the difficulties of responding to it independently:

> The people were undernourished from being out of work and not having enough to eat, when they were taken ill they could not afford the Doctor [...] In Upper Gornal the undertaker had 100 funerals in one week, it was terrible, people did not know what to do.[124]

Opportunities to provide assistance were not neglected, despite the widespread experience amongst the Gornal working class of varying degrees of poverty during these years. A child of particularly poor neighbours, for example, would be provided with a meal, and the family supplied with fuel:

> We did not have much and when Arthur [child of a particularly poverty-stricken family] was playing with me, Mother fed him and when we had a load of coal, gave a bucket of slack to take home to his mother. People in the street would feed children and give coal.[125]

Children were, in turn, instructed by their parents to run errands for elderly neighbours and to refuse the offer of any payment, which was considered inappropriate and unaffordable.[126]

The ties of neighbourliness and of kinship were vulnerable to feuding when physical proximity became a little too much.[127] Mr Latham, whose aunt had been taking him to Himley

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[122] Mr Latham, for example, recalled a week spent with a neighbour when his older sister was born (RPMSI, G23).
[123] Mrs Childs, autobiography, p. 3.
[124] Mrs Childs, autobiography, p. 6.
[125] RPMSI, G6.
[126] Mrs Childs, autobiography, p. 9.

Road Sunday School found himself suddenly without any escort to chapel, following a feud between his mother and her sister (her next-door neighbour). Neighbourly vigilance was such, however, that the stray child's spiritual future was secured by a miner who was a prominent member of Lake Street Primitive Methodist chapel:

> Mr Ike Taylor [...] and his wife Charlotte, their yard looked out onto our yard and they would see everything - they never missed a thing, they was good folk. [...] Now Mr Taylor came to the fence and said, Eedie, let me take him to our chapel [...] So she said 'OK then'. So I remember going round and into his house and when the time came just a few minutes afterwards I was took to the chapel.[128]

Evidence of the vitality of street, neighbourhood and kinship networks draws largely on the testimony of, or refers to the activities of, women. The family, the street and neighbourhood formed a vital nexus for sociability, as well as assistance, for local women, far more, it seems, than was the case for men. [129]

For many Gornal men the main site of sociability was the pub. Several of the Gornal pubs and clubs were dominated by patrons who worked at local industries and met again during their leisure hours. The Horse and Jockey in Upper Gornal and the Limerick in Gornal Wood, for example, were popular venues for Gornal miners, whilst the Old Windmill in Ruiton was a popular resort for local quarry workers.[130] The completion of the Miners' Welfare Club in Gornal Wood was delayed by the War, but it was finally opened in 1941 by the Earl of Dudley. The club provided recreation facilities, including a library and reading room, bowls, tennis, billiards, darts and boxing, as well as a bar.[131] Membership was dominated by Baggeridge miners - all of whom were automatically members - and their guests.[132]

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[127] Robert Roberts warns against a romanticised view of old working-class communities, emphasising the frequency of feuds, alongside mutual assistance (Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (1978), p. 47).

[128] RPMSI, G23.

[129] Cf. Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984), esp. chapter 5; and Ellen Ross, 'Survival networks: women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War One', *History Workshop*, vol. 15 (1983).

[130] *BCB*, September 1979, February 1983 and August 1991.

[131] *DH*, 27 April 1963; *BCB*, May 1991.

[132] *DH*, 13 April 1963.

More usually, however, pubs were predominantly local institutions. The pattern described by a Sedgley local historian emphasises the extent to which pubs in older parts of Gornal (as against new estates built in the 1960s) still today draw their patrons from very small localities and that the pub now functions as perhaps the main hub of small local communities.

> The local communities now are predominantly [...] within the local pubs to a certain extent. There are certain pubs within the area [with] a very strongly focused clientele in the pubs from a very small area [...] There are still some of the pubs that are the focus of local communities.[133]

Oral evidence suggests that whilst the pub was not the only focus of local communities in Gornal between 1914 and 1965 it was a significant one, particularly for men. Interviewees who spoke of their parents frequenting pubs almost always mentioned a 'regular' within a few minutes walking distance of home. [134]

In many cases, fathers were perceived by their children as less sociable than their mothers - or at least ostensibly less concerned about close friendships - but such social contacts as they did enjoy were often primarily those of the pub.[135] Local pubs served as *de facto* club houses for pigeon fanciers and dog-racers, activities which were highly popular in Gornal and which went hand-in-hand with locally organised betting.[136] Such activities were not confined to the public house, sometimes spilling into the streets,[137] but the more formally organised betting, necessarily discreet because illegal, did tend to revolve around public houses, supported by the 'bookie's runner'. [138] Offending not only against religious sensibilities but also the secular law, the runner's job was a risky business, requiring a careful eye for the presence of a policeman.[139]

The activities which centred on the pub were not all, however, entirely contemptible by the strict standards of local evangelical culture. In fact, the pub acted as a centre for the shared

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[133] Interview with Trevor Genge. The book to which Mr Genge refers is his *Britain in Old Photographs: Sedgley and District* (Stroud, 1995).

[134] E.g. RPMSI, G30 and G23.

[135] eg. RPMSI, G19.

[136] See, for example, *DH*, 4 May 1935; RPMSI, G19 and G23. Some pigeon-fanciers, more influenced by local evangelical *mores*, were involved in the *milieu* of local pubs but did not gamble: e.g. the fathers of Mrs Childs (RPMSI, G7) and Mrs Wesley (RPMSI, G30).

[137] RPMSI, G23; Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council Minutes, May 1923.

[138] Off-course cash betting was made illegal by the 1906 Street Betting Act and remained so until legalised in 1960 (see Ross McKibbin, 'Working-Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939', *Past and Present*, 82 (1979), pp. 147-78 (footnote 2, pp. 147-48)); RPMSI, G23.

[139] RPMSI, G6.

enjoyment of, or conversation about, perfectly innocent male pastimes. Mrs Beale, who was married after World War II, did not visit the pub but her husband who, unlike his wife, was not a regular chapel Methodist, did:

> I think he used to like to talk to some of the very old - he would come back with some of the most fantastic tales. And a lot of them were gardeners and they would, say bring the first or the longest runner bean and always try to outdo each other with the size of things.[140]

Moreover, it would be wrong to imply that the pub was an exclusively male domain throughout the period. It has been claimed that during the first half of the century, and particularly during the First World War and after, 'it became more and more socially acceptable for "respectable" women to go into pubs with their husbands'.[141] It seems that it was more common for working-class Gornal women to brew beer at home - a very common practice locally - and occasionally to enjoy a drink at home than to go to the pub.[142] Nevertheless, there is some evidence from Gornal, particularly as the period progressed, of the increasing popularity of family visits to the pubs, usually at the weekend.[143] By the end of the period, the incumbent of St James's Church of England, Lower Gornal, was concerned less with the deleterious effects of the pub on the family - admitting that in so far as the pub encouraged the family to do things together it was beneficial - than with its power, along with a number of other features of modern culture, to draw the whole family away from involvement in associational religion:

> The family can be entertained together in its own home by the T.V. The family can now, with the help of "Children's Rooms" visit the pub to-gether.[144]

Moreover, the relationship between the culture of the pub and that of organised religion cannot be adequately addressed by accepting the discourse of those who were at the evangelical core of local Nonconformity and hence in many cases, in the inter-war years at least, committed to a moral code which fervently embraced teetotalism. Indeed, popular religion found expression in a number of ways, within the context of the pub, as chapter 3 will demonstrate.

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[140] RPMSI, G5.
[141] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 122.
[142] Barnett, *Story of a Village*, p. 23; RPMSI, G17.
[143] For example, Mr Tranter, born in 1926, regularly visited the pub just outside Gornal with his wife (RPMSI, G28).
[144] *Parish Magazine of St James, Lower Gornal*, November 1962.

The strong sense of community and local identity apparently survived into the post-war years in the Black Country, particularly in some of the satellite villages around Dudley.[145] Such attitudes vexed the administrative modernisers of the Black Country who, in the 1930s, called for the expansion of the administrative area of Dudley into a 'Greater Dudley' only to find that the surrounding townships - 'blinded by a narrow outlook, which they call local patriotism' - apparently had no wish to join in such a scheme. [146]

Local patriotism remained perhaps at its strongest in Gornal. Writing in the early 1950s, B.L.C. Johnson and M.J. Wise commented on the prevalence of sub-regional pride in the Black Country and singled out the Gornals for comment: 'the Gornal district remains perhaps the most isolated of all the sub-regions; it possesses its own character and its own separate traditions'.[147] Similarly, Father Charles Elliott, vicar of St James's Lower Gornal at the end of our period, wrote, in an introduction to a short history of the village, of a 'small community [with...] a profound awareness of the past', whilst the author of the history, a local schoolmaster, claimed that Lower Gornal was 'only slowly awakened to the ways of the 20th century'.[148] In 1953 a local reporter observed that 'Lower Gornal is, and was, a community apart' where pubs, clubs, the home, churches and chapels, reinforced by close-knit families, were the hub of community life, concluding 'It is perhaps this spirit of communal co-operation that has done more than anything to give the place its reputation of cherished individuality, independence and "difference"'.[149]

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[145] Perhaps less so in Dudley. In 1933 the editor of the *DH* asked 'Is local patriotism dying?'. Few people, it seemed to the editor, were willing to enter municipal life; thirty years earlier people talked about their town, whereas now they talk of a world brought ever closer by the wireless, aviation etc. (*DH*, 21 October 1933).

[146] *BAD* (1932). Plans to extend the administrative borders of Dudley only came to fruition in 1968.

[147] Johnson and Wise, 'The Black Country 1800-1950', p. 247.

[148] Barnett, *Story of a Village*, pp. 4 and 17.

[149] *DH*, 26 December 1953. The tight-knit community had a negative side: adults from outside the village - 'foreigners' in local parlance - were occasionally made painfully aware of their difference. Mrs Griffiths, who for a short time lived in Upper Gornal in the mid 1950s, recalled that 'everybody knew everybody else in Gornal, we was strangers, outcasts because we weren't Gornal people' (RPMSI, D12). A correspondent for the local Evangelical Church Council Magazine mocked the 'natives' of Gornal for their attitude to 'foreigners' when new council estates began to

During the period 1914-65, Gornal was never overwhelmed with facilities for social functions. Many continued to take place within the confines of, and often were put on by, the local churches and chapels. In Lower Gornal, the Memorial Hall (for the fallen of World War I) was opened by the Earl of Dudley in 1925. Its main function was to serve as a Sunday School building for St James's, the parish church, since the old Sunday School building was too small. But it was intended that the Hall should serve more generally the 'religious and social welfare of the parish'.[150] Within six months it was serving as a clinic for mothers and babies.[151] But social welfare, it quickly became clear, also incorporated, among other things, whist and dances, such events at the Hall regularly attracting gatherings of over 300 people during the inter-war years.[152] Under the control of the parish church, however, it was easy for the organisers to reconcile the provision of social facilities with the standards of the church, insisting, for example, that the Hall's regular social events be suspended during Lent.[153] In Upper Gornal a parish hall, costing £500, was built and opened in 1935 for St Peter's, following the destruction of the old Sunday School building, for 'social purposes', with the purposes of fostering a 'common village consciousness'.[154] Here too, dances were held, sometimes with the purpose of raising money for church funds.[155]

The local Methodist and Congregational churches were also keen to provide entertainments for the local community. They had taken on such roles before the beginning of the period under study, as they had in other parts of the country.[156] Their importance during the

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appear on the edge of the village in the early 1960s, claiming that they 'imagine them all as brash, improvident and morally suspect from the start' (*The Messenger*, September 1964).

[150] *DH*, 25 April 1925.

[151] *DH*, 31 October 1925.

[152] *DH*, 16 May 1925 is the first report of such an event, the like of which appeared frequently in press reports thereafter.

[153] e.g. *DH*, 4 March 1933.

[154] *DH*, 22 June and 2 November 1935.

[155] e.g. *DH*, 9 November 1935.

[156] See, for example, Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 24 and 85-6; A.B. Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey 1880-1939' (Birmingham University PhD thesis, 1987); S.J.D. Green, 'Religion and the Industrial Town: with special reference to the West Riding and Yorkshire 1870-1920' (Oxford University D.Phil thesis, 1989) and *Religion in the Age of Decline, Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire,*

First World War was, if anything, enhanced, concerts often drawing audiences beyond the seating capacities of the venues.[157] Such events extended beyond the constituency of regular attenders at the chapels. Mrs Brooks, a Sunday Scholar at Zoar United Methodist chapel during the First World War, recalled of Sunday school concerts at Zoar chapel that many who did not regularly attend chapel attended and 'used to sit on the window-sills'.[158]

During the inter-war years the chapel choirs, for example, put on operetta and choral works for public consumption.[159] Community singing at social events staged by the Methodists and the Church of England seems to have been particularly popular during the 1920s.[160] Concerts of various sorts - some with a mildly exotic flavour - were staged by the Methodist chapels throughout the 1930s, and with considerable success.[161] Drama and music, with both secular and religious themes, were provided by clubs run by the churches and chapels and sometimes by groups outside the church who hired church premises (usually the Memorial Hall) for performances.[162]

The churches and chapels continued, throughout the Second World War, to serve as venues for much local entertainment in Gornal, including pantomime, music and comedy events staged by the Anglican churches, often in support of the Red Cross,[163] whilst between 200 and 300 people regularly attended dances at the Memorial Hall on annual occasions such as Christmas and Whitsun and for fund-raising events.[164] The Memorial Hall, though in the hands of the parish church, was sometimes used by Nonconformists. In September 1941, for example, Lake Street Methodist Sunday Scholars performed 'Joseph and His Brethren' to a packed hall

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1870-1920 (Cambridge, 1996); Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (1976).

[157] e.g. *DH*, 8 June 1918 and 4 November 1916.

[158] RPMSI, G2.

[159] e.g. at Mount Zion, Upper Gornal, the chapel was crowded for an operetta put on by the Mount Zion with Sedgley High Street Methodist Concert Party (*DH*, 8 April 1933).

[160] e.g. *DH*, 16 April and 11 June 1927.

[161] In February 1939, for example, Zoar chapel attracted an audience of about 400 for a Wednesday evening song recital of Negro spirituals (*DH*, 11 February 1939).

[162] e.g. *DH*, 28 January 1933, 9 February and 11 May 1935.

[163] *DH*, 4 January, 1 and 22 February and 6 December 1941.

[164] *DH*, 4 January 1941, 2 and 16 January, 20 March, 1 May and 19 June 1943

of 600 people which, according to the reporter, was one of the largest gatherings ever at the Hall.[165] The churches and chapels of Gornal continued to serve as venues for social events and entertainments in the years after World War II, and church and chapel groups still put on entertainments, attracting good audiences.[166]

What would become, locally as well as nationally, the most popular form of entertainment, however, had already appeared in Gornal by the beginning of our period: the cinema.[167] Gornal's earliest venture into cinema was in 1912.[168] The Alexandra was cheap, had a capacity of 500 and was very popular. It was never more than basic and, in contrast to the prestigious cinemas of Dudley, which drew people from around the town and beyond, part of its appeal lay in its capacity to provide a meeting place for groups of regulars from around the village, to enjoy the familiarity of a gathering of the local community and the humour of well-known personal idiosyncrasies.[169] A second cinema operated in Dudley Road roughly at the point where Upper Gornal merges into Sedgley. Known as 'Jack Darby's' (after the proprietor), it opened in 1912 and eventually closed in 1960. A similar size to the Alexandra, Jack Darby's was similarly successful, with a capacity enlarged to over 600 in 1936.[170] Like the pub, the cinema was looked upon by some strict Nonconformist families as a bad influence to be avoided.[171] Most interviewees, however, recalled it as part of the fabric of local life, many visiting the cinema weekly or more frequently, especially from childhood up to courting days, until the 1950s when the television began to compete with its attractions.[172]

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[165] *DH*, 20 September 1941.

[166] e.g. *DH*, 3 December 1949 and 6 June 1953; *St James, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, February 1956.

[167] For the popularity of the cinema and statistics about regularity of attendance, see J. Richards and A. Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society, 1930-1970* (1984); J. Richards and D. Sheridan, *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (1987); George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975, Volume I , 1937-1964* (New York, 1976), p. 7; Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955), p. 259 and pp. 208-09.

[168] Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, p. 119.

[169] *BCB*, January 1976, November 1978, February 1995; Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, pp. 119-20.

[170] Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, p. 120. The building now serves as a wall-paper shop.

[171] e.g. RPMSI, G9, G10, G18 and G13.

[172] Most interviewees testified to the local popularity of the cinema.

Dudley: the town centre and the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates

Dudley was predominantly working-class but less exclusively so than the Gornal villages. In 1921, the working class made up approximately 85% of the population of Dudley, at a time when nationally the proportion was in the region of 75 to 80%.[173] In 1951, a sample of the local population suggested that manual labourers comprised 72.5% of the town's population, almost precisely the national figure.[174] According to the authors of the report, skilled labour made up 17.1% of the town's working class, semi-skilled labour a further 42.9% and unskilled labour 12.6%.[175] In 1961, the working class still comprised approximately 75% of the population of Dudley.[176]

Dudley was, of course, much bigger than the Gornal villages, and at least until the early 1930s had a not insubstantial resident middle class, which had grown as a proportion of the population during the second half of the nineteenth century.[177] Nevertheless, there is evidence that many wealthier residents had already moved out of the town before the 1920s. An article in the *Worcester Diocesan Gazette* in 1920 noted that many of the town's wealthier people had 'migrated' and concluded that 'speaking generally, the Church people are not well off'.[178] Dudley was, however, far more clearly residentially segregated by class although, like other Black Country towns and villages, it suffered a shortage of land for building since the possibilities for expansion into suburbs were limited by the propinquity of neighbouring towns and villages, and segregation was often by streets rather than by neighbourhoods, as Trainor noted of the Victorian town.[179] In 1932, there were 499 private address entries for Dudley in Kelly's directory. This figure included several concentrations within particular roads and small groups of streets. Near to the commercial centre of the town were a small number of streets

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[173] Calculated from *Census, 1921: County of Worcester* (1923), p. 57; Benson, *Working Class*, p. 3.
[174] Simey, *Social Aspects*, p. 61; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 106. A crude count from the 1951 census occupational listings would suggest a figure of between 75 and 80% (*Census, 1951: Classification of Occupations* (1951), pp. 312-19).
[175] Simey, *Social Aspects*, pp. 61-3.
[176] *Census, 1961: Socio-Economic Group Tables* (1966), p. 43.
[177] Richard H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 63-4.
[178] *Worcester Diocesan Gazette*, July 1920.
[179] *Conurbation*, p. 93; Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, p.54 .

consisting mainly, or at least partially, of middle-class housing, including Ednam Road, Wolverhampton Street, Wellington Road, St James Road and Grange Road to the west of the town centre. To the east of the centre on the western edge of Kate's Hill a small group of eight streets between Hall Street to the south, St John's Road to the east and Watson's Green Road to the north totalled 63 entries. Further to the east and south of the town centre was Dixon's Green and this area in particular was well supplied with middle-class housing, providing a total of 103 of the 499 listed private addresses for the town in 1932. The majority of the remaining private address entries were on, or adjacent to, two of the main roads running westwards out of Dudley: Himley Road and Stourbridge Road. Later directories suggest, however, that there was some movement away from living in the town, particularly the central areas, by wealthier residents, who preferred to travel from elsewhere to work in the town,[180] and a middle-class trend towards living outside the town apparently continued into the post-war years, according to a town development plan published in 1951.[181]

The social and cultural complexion of Dudley was further complicated during the post-War period by a growing immigrant population. [182] By 1966 the newly formed Dudley Borough Council (incorporating Brierley Hill, parts of Sedgley, Coseley, Tipton and Amblecote) had an estimated 2,350 Commonwealth-born Dudley residents out of a population of 181,000. Most lived in the central areas of the old Borough of Dudley. Amongst the first of Dudley's non-white immigrants were Jamaican West Indians, some of whom had lived in the town since the late 1940s.[183] Despite their Christian culture, West Indian immigrants were not successfully integrated within the town nor within the established churches. Black-dominated neighbourhoods developed at the foot of Kate's Hill around North Street and Porter Street, and

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[180] e.g. Kelly, *Directory of Staffordshire* (1940).

[181] Simey, *Social Aspects*, pp. 59-60. The report noted that the 'professional and miscellaneous services' sector locally was just one-third of the national proportion, suggesting that the explanation probably lay in the preference for such people to live outside the town and adding, that 'it can safely be assumed that its social and cultural life is likely to be weakened if its uniformity outweighs its variety'.

[182] This study does not extend to a consideration of forms of religiosity, whether Christian or of other faiths, amongst immigrant groups, although this would merit a study in itself.

[183] Large-scale West Indian immigration to Britain (particularly from Jamaica) started in 1948 (Pugh, *State and Society*, pp. 269-70).

Pentecostal churches were formed and almost exclusively supported by black worshippers.[184] In 1962 the town suffered race riots as hundreds of white youths stormed the black residential areas, and race relations remained tense in the town throughout the 1960s.[185]

Dudley also received Asian immigrants, as large numbers came from the subcontinent in the 1950s. By the end of the 1960s there were an estimated 170 Punjabi-speaking families in the town. Mainly Sikhs, this community bought a redundant Methodist chapel in Wellington Road (following the construction of the Central Methodist chapel in Wolverhampton Street) in the late 1960s and converted it into the Guru Nanak Sinh Sabju Sikh Temple.[186] There were also around 125 Hindu families from Gujarat by 1969, but the nearest Hindu Temple was in Birmingham.[187] Finally, there was a smaller Pakistani community in Dudley who built a Mosque in Bourne Street in the late 1960s and who sometimes used the Town Hall for Eid festivals.[188]

It is considerably more difficult to reconstruct the social and cultural life of Dudley town centre than it is for Gornal. Many inhabitants were moved from the town centre to new estates during the 1930s and then again during the 1950s. Such evidence as can be drawn upon, however, suggests that working-class experiences in the residential areas of central Dudley before the slum clearances were in many respects similar to those of Gornal residents. On the one hand, the physical conditions of life were at best tolerable and at worst deplorable. On the other hand, the fabric of social life seems to have been characterised by powerful ties of kinship, neighbourhood and community.

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[184] *Draft Report on the Immigrant Community in the County Borough of Dudley* (n.p.: n.d. [c. 1970]; interview with Reverend Paul Tongue, former curate of St Edmund's Dudley. For the Afro-Caribbean churches in Britain and the failure of the established churches to welcome black immigrants, see Gerald Parsons, 'Filling a void? Afro-Caribbean identity and religion', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain from 1945: Volume I: Traditions* (1993), pp. 275-304; also , Clifford Hill, 'Some Aspects of Race and Religion in Britain', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 3 (1970), pp. 30-44..

[185] *DH*, 4 August 1962.

[186] *Draft Report on the Immigrant Community in the County Borough of Dudley.* For a brief summary of the origins of the Sikh faith and of Sikhism in Britain, see Terence Thomas, 'Old allies, new neighbours: Sikhs in Britain', in Parsons (ed.), *Growth of Religious Diversity, Volume I*, pp. 205-42.

[187] *Ibid..*

[188] *Ibid..* I am grateful to Mr Ghulam Choudhary, Chairman of Dudley Mosque and Muslim Community Centre Committee, for information on the Mosque and the use of the Town Hall.

Some of the housing problems which became particularly acute during the 1920s and 1930s were exacerbated by Dudley's economic importance during the Great War. The town's role as a major manufacturing centre for munitions and military hard-ware generated a demand for the housing of munitions workers. The problem of poor quality housing had been raised by prominent Dudley citizens as early as the 1890s, but the first effective attempts to deal with the problem were made between 1915 and 1917 when the Council undertook two building schemes on the eastern edge of the town in the Kate's Hill area.[189] As a result of these developments, the overall increase in the population of Dudley between 1911 and 1921 was largely restricted to St John's Ward, Kate's Hill.

Table 4: Population of Dudley County Borough and of Census wards for central Dudley and Kate's Hill, 1911-1961[190]

	1911	1921	1931*	1951	1961
Dudley County Borough	51079	55894	59583	62526	62965
Castle	8509	8599		4700	3648
St Edmund	2897	2766		5087	4480
St James	6224	6412		5899	6372
St John	5695	8792		5433	4989
St Thomas	7374	7775		5193	3443
Priory				8206	10888

* The census report for 1931 provided no population breakdown by wards for Dudley C.B.

These early attempts to improve the town's housing left the central areas untouched. Overcrowded slum housing remained characteristic of large parts of the town centre. The physical conditions of properties in the slum clearance areas were undoubtedly poor. An investigation of 1925 into the state of the town's housing found 200 courts comprising 1000 houses, mostly opening onto narrow streets, with appalling conditions and many ashpits.[191] Mrs Cash, a lifelong attender at St Edmund's church, was shocked as a child by the conditions obtaining in the poorest areas of the centre. These areas were, she recalled, 'a maze of little streets, courts and yards. It was really very dreadful. It was St Edmund's parish'.[192] From a

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[189] *DH*, 10 July, 23 October and 13 November 1915, 1 January, 29 April, 6 May, 26 August, 2 September 1916, 28 April 1917. Additional information from 'The Black Country and the Great War (1914-1918)', an exhibition held at Dudley Art Gallery, March to September 1996.

[190] Censuses, 1911-1961.

[191] *DH*, Supplement 3 April 1965 (issued in celebration of the centenary of the town's incorporation).

[192] RPMSI, D6.

respectable working-class family, she was forbidden to walk through Birmingham Street, 'the most infamous maze of little tiny streets and courts and places'. The area was notoriously rough:

> The only people who could walk safely in that area were Canon Jones [incumbent of St Edmund's Church], who in his day was a boxer, and he was known to use it. And Sergeant Hall [policeman].[193]

The town's almanac of 1932 similarly described conditions in the Birmingham Street and Fisher Street area of town as 'shocking'. It was noted, moreover, that blocks of housing in Birmingham Street were used as common lodging houses, their tenants 'living separate individual existences, and are of a nomadic, submerged type, gravely impoverished'.[194]

St Edmund's parish contained another maze of courts and alleys in the area of Flood Street. Constitution Hill and Vauxhall Street consisted of 'tiny back-to-back houses and courts and a dozen houses with one toilet in the yard, a terrible place'. The annual St Edmund's Sunday School Festival Procession around the parish was a rare opportunity for the few children from more respectable homes in the Sunday School (the majority were children of the slums) to see life in such homes. Looking through arched entries into courts, 'there was an element of excitement at entering these areas and also amazement that people lived in these places'.[195]

Also in the slum clearance area were many of the courts and alleys on the western edge of the town centre, around Wellington Road and Stafford Street. Mrs Griffiths, a child living with her grandparents in this area of the town in the 1930s recalled the objectionable physical conditions and being branded 'snobbish' by her older relatives for using the town's public baths, rather than the brewhouse, to wash:

> It was revolting, you just locked yourself in [...] We were fortunate to have a back yard and there was a toilet and brewhouse. There was no window just a frame and the door was like a garden gate. Gran and my two maiden aunts thought I was being snobbish.[196]

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[193] RPMSI, D6.
[194] *BAD* (1932 and 1933).
[195] RPMSI, D6.
[196] RPMSI, D12.

On the other hand, Mrs Griffiths also recalled the integrating effect of a sense of local community within the poor area of Stafford Street. Asked why she had attended Wolverhampton Street Methodist Sunday School, she noted the effects of living within an area dominated by properties huddled together and overlooking one another:

> It was probably because of the close-knit community. There was Stafford Street. At the side of my grandmother's house was a wide entry, which led to the back [...] Then there was Cross Street and the backs of the houses faced the back of grandma's with a gap between. It was only up and down a few entries, round the back led to Titchbourne Street where the Sunday School was.[197]

Friendships were formed with neighbours by both children and adults.[198] For men, such friendships were frequently formed, or reinforced, as in Gornal, by the opportunities for sociability offered by the local pub. The father of Mr Hammond, who had moved with his family from Great Bridge, Tipton, to Great Hill in central Dudley in the early 1930s, formed his closest friendships with neighbours through regular visits to the Odd Fellow's Arms at the top of the street. His mother and grandmother, on the other hand, enjoyed half a pint in the domestic security of the 'outhouse'.[199] The pub was also the venue for male members of the family living within a short distance of one another to meet one another. Mrs Griffiths's grandfather, with whom she lived as a child, made plans for Christmas visiting by regular meetings with family at local pubs:

> he used to see them at the pubs 'cos he used to know where they used to drink and he'd go out to the pubs and so he was seeing the family that grandma didn't know about. So he did all the arranging, they all agreed to come.[200]

As in Gornal, women seemingly made occasional visits to the pub, usually at weekends. During the 1930s, Mrs Griffiths's grandmother only rarely went out for pleasure, but when she did, it was to the local pub at the weekend:

> The only time I used to see grandma go out, she used to go to the Shakespeare pub at the bottom of Stafford Street. Perhaps Sunday night, occasionally Saturday night.[201]

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[197] RPMSI, D12.
[198] e.g. RPMSI, D16.
[199] RPMSI, D16.
[200] RPMSI, D10.
[201] RPMSI, D12.

If the male sphere was 'public', in both senses of the word, it was not the case that the domestic female sphere was private. Referring to the work of Philip Ariès on the early modern period, Elizabeth Roberts has argued:

> The working-class habit of *public* sociability, usually in the form of conversations in the street, was a remnant, an echo, of a social custom which had once been widespread throughout all ranks of society [...] The concept of privatised, isolated family life was much later in reaching the working class than other strata of society.[202]

In old Dudley, the boundary between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the street was blurred. Mrs Griffiths remembered the atmosphere on Sundays when people walked up Stafford Street on their way to St Thomas's:

> You'd see them going up in couples going up to Church, Top Church. And gran would, on summer evenings, sit in the little front room by the window and speak to them and have a little talk to them.[203]

During the 1920s and 1930s when levels of unemployment were high, poverty was endemic in the central areas of town. At its worst, local distress was such in the parish of St Thomas that the incumbent, the Reverend A.H. Phelips, expressed concern in the parish magazine and, in a manner reminiscent of the lady visitor activities of the late nineteenth century, suggested that ladies in the congregation might visit, and report to the clergy on, special cases.[204] In 1932, the spirit of joy at Christmas was absent, it was observed, due to unemployment and poverty, and a small Committee of Clergy and Free Church ministers was formed in Dudley to help, starting by providing small Christmas gift for some of the worst cases, the Public Assistance Committee assisting in distribution.[205]

Informal charity - or working-class mutual assistance - was arguably more important on a day-to-day level. The ethic of working-class neighbourly assistance, so characteristic of Gornal life, was also found in the old communities of central Dudley:

> She would help people. There was a couple that used to live close to us. I don't think they were ever married, but grandma would send them their lunch. A bit of meat in a bag and

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[202] Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 189.
[203] RPMSI, D12.
[204] *St Thomas Parish Magazine, Dudley*, November 1932.
[205] *St Thomas Parish Magazine, Dudley*, December 1932.

> she'd tell me to take it to them. They weren't elderly, but really poor, just tiles with sacking on the floor. Grandma made sure they had a Christmas dinner.[206]

Working-class mutual help in Dudley, as in Gornal, drew on the existence of extensive kinship and neighbourhood networks. The maternal family of Miss Haywood, born in 1927, formed what amounted to a family tailoring business, all working from homes in central Dudley. Of her mother's family, two sisters and a brother lived next door to her in Hellier Street. Mrs Beattie, who lived with her widowed mother in Stafford Street, and her grandmother and aunt, who also lived on Stafford Street, were 'in and out of each others' houses'.[207] Mr Lewis, who moved to the Wren's Nest Estate as a child, remembered a little from his own experiences and was told by his parents of the ways of life in older parts of Dudley. Born in Gad's Lane, off Wolverhampton Street, 'nearly all' his relatives lived in the Cross Street and Dock area of the town centre before they were moved to the new estates, a situation typical of the area:

> everybody had relatives close in Cross Street, Titchbourne Street, Stafford Street, The Inhedge, Steppingstone Street [... visiting each other] was a regular thing. No doors bolted [...] In those days they had back-to-front [*sic*] houses and you could shake hands with the next door neighbour so in those days you had a lot of trust and a lot of faith in people. You didn't do anything wrong because they hadn't got anymore than you'd got.[208]

When the planned clearances first became public, in the late 1920s, the incumbent of St Edmund's church, the parish of which would shortly be decimated by the clearances, commented, in a somewhat patronising and mawkish way, but with a strong sense of the existence of the comforts of familiarity within established neighbourhoods and communities:

> Some of the sweetest, cosiest, happiest and most Christian of homes in the town are situated in this area. It is sad in a way that the old neighbourhood in the shadow of the old Church is to be demolished to give place to goodness knows what.[209]

The result was devastating for the residential areas of the town centre. Within ten years of this comment Reverend Sidaway, incumbent at the parish church of St Thomas, just a few hundred yards up the High Street from St Edmund's commented bitterly, in his report to the Parish Church Council, on 'the Council's obvious pleasure in the childish game of "pulling down".

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[206] RPMSI, D12.
[207] RPMSI, D1.
[208] RPMSI, D21.
[209] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, October 1928.

Much of the parish, he claimed, was in a 'lamentable condition only equalled by the devastated areas of the War years, with their furtive holes and corners, and the demoralising effect of their drab ruin'.[210]

The result of the slum clearances was a large-scale de-population of the town centre. Further town centre slum clearances took place in the 1950s. By the end of the decade, the parish of St Luke's in the town centre, for example, had lost 1200 people (around a quarter of the parish) to the new housing estates, particularly the new Russell's Hall Estate on ground reclaimed from pit workings to the west of the town centre.[211] No attempt was made until the mid-1960s to re-populate the centre which was increasingly dominated by administrative and commercial premises.[212] A post-war report estimated the population of the centre at just 3000 and described the remaining semi-residential areas as

> a mixture of poor housing, small works and general shops. None of these three areas [...] strictly fall[s] into any grouping which could be called a Neighbourhood, being predominantly composed of business, shopping and administrative buildings. Residential property is intermingled with these buildings in a somewhat haphazard way.[213]

The remaining residents of the town centre area, according to the findings of the researchers, were less than enamoured with their environment:

> the three [of the town centre] areas were not looked on with favour by their residents, as there was a low proportion in all of them of inhabitants who would prefer to live in the same district and among the same people. This is obviously a reflection of a poor standard of housing and a lack of residential amenities.[214]

It seems reasonable to assume that residents' dissatisfaction with their living areas in the post-war years was also attributable to the absence, resulting from the clearances, of kinship and neighbourhood networks.[215]

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[210] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine, Dudley*, February 1937.

[211] *DH*, 23 January 1959.

[212] Only in 1963 did plans materialise for a £1 million development of flats in the Old and New Dock areas to house 348 families from some of the last slum clearances: *DH*, 11 May 1963.

[213] Simey, *Social Aspects*, p. 47.

[214] *Ibid.*, p. 47. Interviews with Dudley residents for the report included the question "If free to choose, would you prefer to live among the same kind of people [i.e. as you presently do]?" Interviews of town centre area totalled just 26 (out of 634 for the whole of Dudley). Of these, 8 people answered 'No' to this question, 15 answered 'Yes': Tables IV and V, pp. 158-9. To the question, "If free to choose, would you prefer to live in the same district?", 16 answered 'Yes' and 10 answered 'No'.

[215] Cf. the residents of Bethnal Green at roughly the same time who, according to Young and Willmott, acknowledged the poor quality of their housing but nevertheless enjoyed living there due

The inter-war years were, nationally, a period of unprecedented local council intervention, by virtue of national legislation, in the provision of housing, following Lloyd George's 'Homes Fit For Heroes' campaign at the end of the War and the Housing and Town Planning ('Addison') Act of 1919.[216] Dudley council began a council house programme under the national provisions, but was quickly forced to adopt a systematic programme of slum clearance and to restrict council house provision to the re-housing of slum dwellers.[217] A small housing estate, consisting of low rent housing, was built east of the town centre. The major development, however, was that of the large new estate to the north west of the town centre, built on 521 acres of the Priory Estate bought by the Corporation in 1926 from the Earl of Dudley. It was intended that a 'garden city' should be built to house 20,000 people.[218] Proposals were submitted in 1929 and the building programme completed ten years later.

The scheme was launched and pursued with enthusiastic optimism. It was hoped that removing slum-dwellers from 'horrible, nauseous conditions' to 'more pleasant surroundings' would produce 'good citizens',[219] and early reports of life on the Priory Estate were encouraging: despite the 'economic stringency' of the early 1930s, tenants on the Priory Estate were reported to be taking good care of their houses and gardens.[220]

Considerable improvements in the material conditions of life there undoubtedly were. The authors of a post-war report commented on the pleasant physical environment of the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates:

> It [Priory Hill] is situated on one of the most pleasant sites in the Town, overlooked on one side by the wooded slopes of Castle Hill, and grouped in a horseshoe shape around Wren's Nest Hill, which is a wooded open space.[221]

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to the people (usually their relatives): Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, p. 44.

[216] For the history of council housing and state legislation between the wars, and the effects on local communities, see M. Swennarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (1981); John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (1986); Benson, *Working Class*, Table 8, p. 73; Madeline McKenna, 'The suburbanization of the working-class population of Liverpool between the wars', *Social History*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1981), pp. 173-89 (p. 176).

[217] *BAD* (1932, 1933 and 1934).

[218] *BAD* (1927).

[219] *BAD* (1931 and 1932).

[220] *BAD* (1932).

[221] Simey, *Social Aspects*, p. 40.

This aspect of life on the Estate was recalled by interviewees old enough to recall life before their move from other parts of the town. Mrs Young, born in 1926, lived in Church Street (near St Thomas's church) until large-scale demolitions took place in Church Street and its surrounding courts in 1935.[222] She recalled:

> When we came here and I was 9, there was just this side [west] of Wren's Nest Road to the corner, one side of Gorse Road, back round to the Washington [pub]. You could walk from here, you could go out of our gate here and around that corner there and up a big hill and it was all fields [...] And at the back you could climb over the fence, and there were no houses.[223]

Mr Slater, whose family was amongst the first to move onto the Estate, was also impressed by the improvements in the material conditions of life:

> In them days you'd got no bathrooms, in the olden days - one brewhouse, one lavatory, take it in turns to do washing, and only one lavatory, no baths. Just an old tin tub in those days. The conditions down here were ten times better.[224]

Mrs Beattie, who had lived with her widowed mother in Stafford Street, had similar recollections of material improvements:

> Well it was different, it was like a new house. The old building in Stafford Street - just two bedrooms [...] - was terrible. Me and four sisters and mum. There were six of us when we came down here and we had three bedrooms down here.[225]

From the very beginnings of the estates' history, however, doubts were expressed locally about the behaviour of their citizens. A report in the local press in 1931 commented on the uprooting of trees and fences by residents who took these items home, concluding 'Dudley Town Council intended to make the Priory an ideal estate, but it would appear that they are being badly hampered by the residents'.[226] Another report bemoaned the vile language and behaviour.[227] In January 1939 Reverend V.C. Powell, vicar of the new estate churches of St Francis (Priory) and St Christopher (Wren's Nest), was asked 'Why do you build on this estate? Nobody will come', a comment he considered 'un-Christian'.[228] A year later, Powell had

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[222] Sixty-six properties were demolished, leaving 304 people to be re-housed: Dudley Register of Houses in Clearance Areas, 1932-1970.
[223] RPMSI, D30.
[224] RPMSI, D26.
[225] RPMSI, D1; cf. RPMSI, D18.
[226] *DH*, 28 February 1931.
[227] *DH*, 14 February 1931.
[228] *DH*, 28 January 1939.

complained to the diocesan authorities that, 'the people among whom she [the church of St Christopher] is built are mostly pagans of the poorest social class, who have no moral standard other than the fear of being found out', and that he faced an up-hill struggle in the task of trying to change 'a very sadly degraded community into citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven'.[229] The press and church magazines periodically carried reports of acts of petty vandalism and of gambling in the streets. Residents of respectable working-class areas of the borough also looked askance at the new estates, particularly the Wren's Nest, which obtained a reputation for being anything but respectable.[230] Moreover, the two estates - Priory and Wren's Nest - existed in a state of some mutual hostility, partially separated by a hill which divided Wren's Nest to the west from the Priory to the east. Residents of the Priory Estate, recalled a curate of St Christopher's during the 1950s, looked down on residents of the Wren's Nest Estate. The difference was partly one of appearance: on the Priory Estate, houses had hedges and gardens, whereas those on the Wren's Nest Estate lacked such trimmings and the estate was frequently strewn with litter.[231] But the appearances reflected a sense of some respectability attaching to the Priory Estate. 'We always reckoned the Wren's Nest was rougher than the Priory and the Priory Estate lads were scared of the Wren's Nest lads', recalled one former Wren's Nest estate resident.[232] 'Policemen on the Wren's Nest used to go in twos,' recalled another.[233] The local press reflected such problems, carrying reports of fights taking place on the estate.[234]

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[229] The assertions are quoted in a response by Bishop Duppuy of Worcester, thanking Powell for his report on work at St Christopher's, and suggesting that if the report is to be printed the two expressions should be deleted since, Duppuy observed, 'I think a sweeping generalisation of this kind might only discourage the people of the place': letter from Bishop C.R. Duppuy to Reverend V.C. Powell, 5 March 1940, St Francis Incumbents' Correspondence, etc.. Unfortunately, the diocesan archives at Worcester contained no trace of this correspondence. These local concerns reflected national ones: a Commemoration Fund was set up by the Methodist Church in 1931, with a target of half a million pounds, dedicated to working towards union, church extension in new areas and new attempts to reach the unchurched, but in 1933 F. Luke Wiseman spoke of his fear that new districts were sinking into 'paganism' for want of churches ('Presidential Address', *Methodist Minutes of Conference*, 1933, pp. 376-77).

[229] *DH*, 28 January 1939.

[230] e.g. RPMSI, D7. 'Priory suffers from the fact that its inhabitants do not particularly wish to be identified with the area, which has the reputation of being inhabited by people who have lived in slums' (Simey, *Social Aspects*, p. 43).

[231] Information provided by Reverend Alan Hayward, curate of St Christopher's 1956-9, private telephone conversation with the author.

[232] RPMSI, D11.

[233] RPMSI, D11.

[234] e.g. *DH*, 23 October 1937.

Within a few years, the early optimism had waned, but the cause for concern was beginning to shift from the alleged delinquency of the residents to the perceived problem of a lack of any strong sense of community on the estate. Some concern was expressed about the lack of any integrative institutions whilst the estates remained unfinished. In 1935, the Mayor of Dudley urged the Council to help provide a social centre on the Priory Estate, and regretted that little had been done to take advantage of the Council's offer of land on the estates for the building of churches and chapels.[235]

The church of St Francis had been completed in 1932 on Laurel Road, though it was positioned at one corner of the Priory Estate and its congregation and clergy expected for years afterwards that the building would be replaced by a grander church at a location more central to the Estate.[236] The Wren's Nest Estate did not have its own church until St Christopher's was built in 1937, by which time the estate had been inhabited by a population of thousands for several years. In his address to the annual parochial meeting in 1945, the Reverend S.G. Wakeling, incumbent at St Francis's and St Christopher's between 1944 and 1948, urged that the church should become a communal centre, since the Wren's Nest Estate, in particular, lacked an institution to provide such a function.[237] The assessment of the borough's new housing estates by the town's historians in 1949 was becoming the orthodoxy:

> Cut off from the sources of their communal life in the slums, the inhabitants of the new housing estates had no guidance or facilities for new communal and recreational interests. The result was that damage to property and delinquency became real problems. The former inhabitants of the slums required to be taught a civic spirit.[238]

By the mid 1950s, the problem of the absence or presence of 'community' within given areas - and particularly the effects of the new inter-war housing estates - was attracting attention in a number of studies around the country.[239] Dudley's town planning report of 1951 articulated

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[235] *DH*, 16 November 1935.
[236] St Francis Parish Church Council Minutes, 4 May 1932.
[237] *DH*, 3 February 1945.
[238] Chandler and Hannah, *Dudley*, p.171.
[239] See, for examples, R. Jevons and J. Madge, *Housing Estates* (Bristol, 1946); R. Durant, *Watling: A Survey of Social Life on a New Housing Estate* (1939); Young and Willmott, *Family and Kinship*; J.M. Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood* (Oxford, 1956).

many of the problems identified in such studies in a systematic survey of the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates. The area, the author claimed,

> differs fundamentally from the other Dudley Neighbourhoods in that it has no original older settlement as its nucleus [...] A troublesome social problem has to be faced in the Neighbourhood in so far as neither an old-established physical centre nor a living social tradition exist [...] Priory Hill possesses schools, shops, churches and associated youth clubs, and a clinic, but they are not related to each other so as to form a nucleus of social amenities.[240]

The new estates also lacked the community of established neighbourhoods and kinship networks characteristic of Gornal and the older parts of Dudley. Between 1932 and 1938 nearly 600 properties in the town centre were destroyed and nearly 3000 people re-housed. The records of clearances and re-housing indicate that whilst many would have had, amongst their new neighbours, one or two people who lived on their streets in old Dudley, they were very rarely, if ever, surrounded by such old acquaintances and only occasionally were next-door neighbours moved together to adjacent houses on the new estates.[241] Children left their friends behind,[242] and relatives were seen relatively infrequently after moving to the estates. Mr Bedford, born in 1925, lived in St James Terrace off St James Road until moving to the Wren's Nest Estate. The move was for him and his family a marked change:

> There were aunts and uncles around, some lived in the St James Road area [...] We saw quite a bit of them at St James.
>
> Q. When you moved from St James terrace, did a lot neighbours move at same time?
> Yes, but they were scattered around, not all moved together. A lot of neighbours were new neighbours when we moved down.[243]

Ten to fifteen years later, neighbourhood ties were, it would seem, still considerably more tenuous on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates than in the more established parts of the town. As the town's planning report commented of the Priory area:

> Its inhabitants do tend [...] to have fewer friends and relatives in the same street than the average for the Borough [...] a collection of people has been grouped together in this Neighbourhood who have nothing in common except the urgency of their needs which has placed them high on the priority lists of the Housing Department. The emphasis has been from the beginning on the individual dwelling, and the needs of the individual family, rather

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[240] Simey, *Social Aspects*, pp. 41-2.
[241] Dudley Registers of Homes in Clearance Areas, 1932-1970, 7 volumes, volumes 1 and 2.
[242] e.g. Mr Slater (RPMSI, D26).
[243] RPMSI, D3.

> than on the promotion of good social relationships [...] Priory Hill thus forms a community of people who have yet to find their common interests.[244]

A paper delivered in December 1953 to the Royal Sanitary Institute by Dudley's Chief Sanitary Inspector referred to the continued existence of 3,500 unfit houses in Dudley, many areas still containing courts and alleys, sharing common yards and facilities. The answer, however, no longer seemed as simple as it had done in the 1920s. The new inter-war estates, the paper argued, had succeeded in removing the claustrophobic excesses of much of the old slum housing, but perhaps at the cost of any strong sense of community.[245]

The public houses of the new estates did not function as a focus for male sociability - and thus as a form of communal centre - nearly so effectively as they did in Gornal and old central Dudley. There were several large pubs on the estates, but oral evidence suggests that estate residents preferred to continue to patronise pubs in the town centre. Local pubs were often shunned and sometimes plagued by bad reputations. Mr Carter and Mrs Carter both moved to the Wren's Nest Estate as children, but although the Washington, on Wren's Nest Road, was just a minute's walk away neither they nor their parents ever became regulars there, preferring to frequent pubs in the town centre where he played crib:

> Mr: No, he [father] never went in a public round here.
> Mrs: Never went in the Washington.
> Mr: Only went in there once - with me. He didn't like it. I didn't like it. All the old ones had died and the young ones were fighting.
> Mrs: There was fighting there when I was a kid.[246]

Several other interviewees who lived on the estates, including Mrs Young, Mr Young, Mr Bedford, Mrs Causer and Mr Lewis, stated that they, or their fathers, preferred to visit pubs in other parts of the town, often socialising with work colleagues rather than neighbours.[247] Some simply preferred not to go out at all, and if they drank at all, did so at home.[248] As the town's planning report concluded of the Priory area:

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[244] Simey, *Social Aspects*, pp. 42-3.
[245] *DH*, 5 December 1953.
[246] RPMSI, D4.
[247] RPMSI, D30, D3, D6, D21.
[248] e.g. the fathers of Mr Bedford (RPMSI, D3) and Mr Lewis (RPMSI, D21).

> Few of its inhabitants are employed within the Neighbourhood, and the range of their social life, so far as the immediate locality goes, tends to be restricted to those activities which are carried on within the home.[249]

Dudley was far better provided with leisure amenities than the Gornal villages. As in Gornal, many were provided by the local churches and chapels and by Christian organisations such as the YMCA, which had a hut in Hall Street from 1921.[250] The latter, for example, in 1920-1 put on a series of twenty-four 'musicales' at the Empire Cinema which were attended by 25,000 people.[251] Similarly, a large congregation filled Wesley United Methodist chapel, Wolverhampton Street, for an organ recital in December 1921.[252] Annual socials, such as the Easter tea at St Edmund's, also attracted large numbers in excess of the usual Sunday congregations, as did whist drives and dances.[253] In many cases, however, events organised within the two main Anglican churches, St Edmund's and St Thomas's, were for the consumption of members of church clubs rather than for the general public. Those that were for the general public all too often evoked a poor response. A series of organ recitals given by the organist of St Thomas's church in the 1936, for example, drew small audiences. A report in the parish magazine grumbled, 'If the people of Dudley realised the quality of the music offered in these Recitals the Church would be full'.[254]

Entertainments provided by St Francis's and St Christopher's on the Priory and Wren's Nest for the general public in the 1930s often evoked a disappointing response.[255] Twenty years later, Reverend Arthur Dawson Caterall expressed his dismay at the lack of social events in the parish. It was vital, he argued, that the parish should have regular social activities.[256] As at St Thomas's and St Edmund's, social activities at St Francis's and St

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[249] Simey, *Social Aspects*, p. 41. Compare Mogey's comments about the old area of Oxford and the new housing estate: 'the family in St Ebbe's may be said to be neighbourhood centred. The estate family in its new bureaucratic landscape was more inturned on itself and can be said to be family centred' (Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood*, p.75).

[250] *DH*, 12 November 1921.

[251] *DH*, 2 April 1921.

[252] *DH*, 17 December 1921.

[253] e.g. *DH*, 13 April 1929; *Parish Magazine of St Edmunds, Dudley*, October 1926; *St Thomas's, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, June 1929.

[254] *St Thomas, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, December 1936.

[255] e.g. *St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher' Church*, October 1937 and May 1938.

[256] *St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher' Church*, November 1957.

Christopher's were apparently more usually organised for clubs and organisations within the church, rather than for the parish as a whole.

The churches and chapels of Dudley faced severe competition from other providers of entertainment from the very beginning of our period. The variety of commercial entertainments on offer was far greater, and the opportunities for involvement in, or enjoyment of, non-commercial but also non-church related activities and entertainments were also far in excess of what was on offer in Gornal.

Sports groups were legion in Dudley by the beginning of our period. The town had its own professional football and cricket clubs.[257] In the early 1920s, the County Cricket Ground was bought by the Municipal authorities owing to the 'great increase in the demand since the war for greater facilities for out-door sports and exercises'.[258] Amateur and works teams were also plentiful. By the mid-1920s Dudley offered multiple sports clubs associated not only with church and chapel (within which sports clubs were frequently formed), but also with works, pubs and other independent organisations.[259]

The town started the twentieth century with a small number of major commercial entertainments venues. There were three theatres. Most important of these, and longest-surviving, was the Dudley Opera House which, for thirty-seven years, provided drama, opera, and musical comedy until it burnt down in 1936.[260] The Dudley Hippodrome, opened in 1938 and, with a seating capacity of 1700, throughout the war years and the following two decades, according to one local writer, 'could guarantee a full house at every performance', with crowds occasionally filling all the approach roads in the hope of gaining admittance to see particularly popular stars.[261]

During the first half of the twentieth century, Dudley was increasingly well supplied with venues for film-shows, with some of the earliest appearing before the First World War in

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[257] Parsons, *Portrait*, pp. 55-6.
[258] *BAD* (1925).
[259] *BAD* (1925).
[260] *BCB*, December 1979; Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 55.
[261] *BCB*, November 1993; Parsons, *Portrait of the Black Country*, p. 55; Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, pp. 139-40. Stars who appeared at the Hippodrome between 1938 and its closure in 1964 included George Formby, Bob Hope, Laurel and Hardy, Max Miller, Harry Secombe, Peter Sellers and Richard Tauber.

rooms converted for the purpose.[262] Between 1914 and 1965, the town had several cinemas, some relatively modest buildings with accommodation for just a few hundred, but others able to accommodate up to 2000 and built on a grand scale and in imposing styles. A few were relatively short-lived, appearing and disappearing during the inter-war years. Others went through a succession of owners, buildings and names but survived into the post-war years.[263]

During the early stages of World War I the cinema was still regarded with suspicion by some 'respectable' Christians and clergymen. The Diocesan lay reader, Dr Messiter, for example, addressed Dudley Ruri-Decanal Council on the matter of the healthy mind and the healthy body in war-time and specifically mentioned the cinema as a form of entertainment with serious dangers.[264] Alfred Hooper, minister of King Street Congregational church in Dudley, was more overtly damning. He had received complaints about the lowering of moral tone in cinemas and theatre and wrote in the local press in September 1916 that he had paid two visits to the cinema to get news from the trenches. The films and entertainments, he observed, included tales of adultery, 'sordid scenes' and vulgar and coarse remarks about immoral relationships, such that 'a number of people' walked out in disgust.[265] Nevertheless, the cinemas became sites for congregating and at the end of the War, on Armistice day, the people of Dudley filled not only the local churches to celebrate, but also the local cinemas, many being turned away due to demand.[266]

Dudley had also inherited from the second half of the nineteenth century a legacy of municipal improvement and civic amenities, developments based on the adoption of permissive legislation during the 1860s and 70s. A museum and art gallery - initially part of the town's Mechanics' Institute - were provided with their own imposing premises at the bottom of St James Road in 1884, and public baths had been opened in 1880.[267] A free library was opened in 1884, housed in the same building as the museum and art gallery, and seems to have been

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[262] J. Ned Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country* (Wolverhampton, 1982), p. 137.
[263] Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, pp. 137-46.
[264] *DH*, 26 February 1916.
[265] *DH*, 16 September 1916. Hooper received some letters of support and some of opposition (see *DH*, *DH*, 30 September and 21 October 1916).
[266] *DH*, 16 November 1918.
[267] Trainor, *Black Country Elites*, p. 50.

heavily and increasingly used by the years around the beginning of the First World War.[268] Further civic building was carried out during the inter-war period, with a town hall built and opened in 1928 at the town-centre end of St James Road. In 1931, the Brooke Robinson museum was opened on the opposite side of the road.[269]

The churches in Dudley therefore operated within a more diverse - and potentially popular - gathering of institutions than was the case in Gornal from the very beginning of the period. If the churches and chapels in Gornal could not attract everybody to Sunday services, they were confronted by fewer local counter-attractions than those of Dudley, at least at the beginning of the period. Gornal residents, many of them infrequent Sunday attenders, were drawn within the ambit of the churches and chapels by virtue of the entertainments and occasions offered by the latter. Moreover, the Gornal villages retained a strong sense of community, with established kinship and neighbourhood networks surviving in many parts of the villages throughout the period. In Dudley, by contrast, the churches were confronted from the 1930s on the one hand by a decimated town centre population, and on the other hand by a large new council estate lacking a strong sense of local community within which they could become a focal point. The extent to which, and the ways in which, the local populations of the three areas engaged in religious practices, in church, at home and elsewhere, is the subject of the next chapter.

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[268] *BAD* (1914 and subsequent issues).
[269] Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 50; Chandler and Hannah, *Dudley*, p. 174.

Chapter 3

Religious Practices in Dudley and the Gornals 1914-65

Regular attendance at Sunday worship is a major part of what Glock and Stark termed the ritualistic dimension of religiosity, that is the specifically religious practices expected of religious adherents.[1] This study as a whole will argue that there was a significant amount of common ground in terms of religious beliefs and experiences and religiously-derived ethical standards amongst regular and irregular churchgoers. The ritual dimension of religiosity by definition establishes a significant difference between those for whom daily, or at least weekly, life in many ways revolved around church or chapel and those for whom it did not. Nevertheless, in the private domain of domesticity and in some public arenas outside the walls of the church, the infrequent attender continued to engage in practices which remained central to the lives of regular churchgoers: prayer, the singing of hymns, the religious education of children, listening to, or joining in services broadcast on radio and television, and observance of the Sabbath. Moreover, the majority of irregular, as well as regular, churchgoers continued to partake of the services of local churches and chapels for the rites of passage which marked birth, marriage and death[2] and, whilst failing, as the church saw it, to fulfil their duty of weekly attendance, appeared year after year at some of the special services held at the churches and chapels. Since it has generally been assumed that there existed a wide gulf between the churched and the unchurched and, until recently, that the working class who failed to attend church regularly were, at best, religiously apathetic, this chapter will explore the aspects of religious practice which the broader constituency of those on the margins of associational religion shared with those at its core.

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[1] Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago, 1965), p. 20.

[2] Funerals are not considered in this chapter, partly due to the difficulties in broaching the subject in oral interviews but also due to the fact that unlike birth, death must be followed by some sort of event in order to dispose of the body, and unlike marriage, there was seen to be little alternative to a religious funeral. It is in the choices made to have a child baptised and to be married in church that underlying attitudes are more clearly discernible.

Rites of Passage

As Sarah Williams has convincingly demonstrated in the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Southwark, infrequent attendance at weekly Sunday services should not be equated with religious indifference.[3] In Dudley and Gornal during the twentieth century, the services of the churches were called upon for rites of passage in the form of churching, baptism and marriage services. Moreover, the popular church and chapel festivals which, year after year, attracted many from beyond the constituency of regular attenders, were those which drew more upon family traditions and local customs than upon the universal Christian calendar: in particular, the Sunday School Anniversary and Harvest Festival. Christmas services were also well attended, especially during the post-War years with the introduction in many of the local Anglican churches of a Christmas Eve Midnight service, sometimes bringing the number of Christmas communicants on a par with, or in excess of, Easter communicants.

The rituals of churching and baptism were not exclusively understood in terms of their metaphysical significance.[4] Following Pickering, a distinction might usefully be made between ritual and ceremony, where the former consists in formalized action relating to a deity, and the latter in stylized behaviour not related to such a being.[5] The latter may, however, have more than an aesthetic purpose. As Pickering observes, rites of passage involve family, kin and the local community and participants stand in a socially structured situation.[6] The ceremonial aspects of such services function to acknowledge and reinforce social and communal norms.[7] Social conformity was generally equated with moral probity and for some, the visible expression of social conformity was more important than any metaphysical meanings in rites of passage services. For the majority, however, the social and the metaphysical imperatives combined.

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[3] Sarah Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture: A Study of the South London Borough of Southwark c.1880-1939' (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 1993), chapter 4.

[4] The metaphysical beliefs relating to churching and baptism are discussed in chapter 4.

[5] W.S.F. Pickering, 'The persistence of rites of passage: towards an explanation', *British Journal of Sociology*, 25 (1974), pp. 63-78 (p. 75).

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[7] Cf. Alan Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey, 1880-1939' (PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1987), pp. 182-84. David Clark discusses baptism in Staithes in anthropological terms which emphasise the socio-cultural nature of the act (David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 113-16 and 125-26).

The national popularity of baptism well into the twentieth century, amongst a constituency well beyond the confines of regular church-goers, is well documented.[8] The continued prevalence of baptism was partly the product of deeply rooted social expectations, which embraced even the religiously agnostic. Mrs Smart, a Priory Estate resident who never attended church as an adult and stopped believing in God in her late teens, had the first four of her eight children baptised,[9] believing that local people would have been shocked by the failure to do so and would have refused to talk to her.[10] Interviewees from both Dudley and Gornal, churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike, attested to the importance of social expectations in enforcing observance of baptism.[11]

Conformity was enforced not only by communal norms but also by the vocal insistence of family members - particularly older female family members - and the practice was thus transmitted through the generations. Mrs Mason, a lifelong attender at Five Ways chapel in Lower Gornal, emphasised that this remains the case:

> If they come at all there's always a granny or a great granny or something, who said 'You ought to go and have that baby baptised or christened', 'cos the old ones always did, didn't they? [...] In all the churches the granny would say that, just the same.[12]

Up-bringing was an important influence in choosing to have children baptised, and the ritual was an acknowledgement of the continuity of familial norms and expectations into the new generation. As Mr Tranter, an occasional Methodist at Upper Gornal during his young adulthood, stated: 'it meant that you was accepting God and the way of life that comes [...]

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[8] Pickering, 'The persistence of rites of passage', p. 64; John Wolffe, 'The Religions of the Silent Majority', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945, Volume I: Traditions* (1993), pp. 305-46 (p. 313). Cf. Edward Bailey, 'The Religion of a "Secular" Society', (Bristol University, PhD thesis, 1976), p. 129, where a great majority of requests for baptism in a Bristol parish were from non church-going parents. Also Peter G. Forster, 'Residual religiosity on a Hull council estate', *Sociological Review*, 37 (August 1989), pp. 474-504 (p. 487).

[9] Born in the 1950s; the second four were born in the 1960s.

[10] RPMSI, D25.

[11] e.g. RPMSI, D3, D8 (Mr Downing), G6, D29, D30, D4 (Mr and Mrs Carter), G24, G10 (Mr Fletcher), D23.

[12] RPMSI, G22. Cf. RPMSI, G4, where Mr Beddoe emphasises that his wife's mother insisted on the christening, because she was 'very religious', and RPMSI, G1, where Mr Bailey explains that his daughter was christened in 1958 at the insistence of his own mother and wife. Also RPMSI, D30 where Mr and Mrs Young both attested to the influence of their mothers in having their son christened in 1954.

from your up-bringing. It was a matter of up-bringing'.[13] Nevertheless, husbands were, to the concern of local clergy, often absent from baptisms. Women were the main initiators of participation in such rites, whilst godparenting, which reinforced the ties of close family and friends, was also frequently restricted to women.[14]

The centrality of family was such that parents sometimes preferred to return to the church in which they were married, at which one, or both, of them attended as children, or with which there was some strong family connection, particularly amongst Priory and Wren's Nest Estate residents during the first two decades of the estates' existence.[15] Nevertheless, convenience dictated that the majority of baptisms of Priory and Wren's Nest Estate infants took place at the new estate churches.

Interviewees in Dudley and Gornal expressed surprise - even, it occasionally seemed, some offence - when asked if they had been baptised or if they had had their own children baptised.[16] Baptism - and sometimes its announcement in parish or chapel magazines - was regarded as an important confirmation of the parents' moral probity and even, it seems, of the child's legitimacy. Mrs Childs, an Upper Gornal Methodist, was so angered by the failure of a chapel member at Mount Zion to have the baptism of her child announced in the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church magazine that she left the church to attend neighbouring Kent Street chapel in 1945:

> We was married at Mount Zion and 3 years afterwards had Rosemary and he [a chapel official] never put Rosemary's name in *The Messenger*. People would think in Upper Gornal that she had never been baptised [...] It was Mr B____ and [his daughter], she had a child

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[13] RPMSI, G28.

[14] e.g. *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, May 1940; Mrs Brooks (RPMSI, G2) related how her brother-in-law was called out of a meeting at Zoar chapel to act as godfather to her daughter since the vicar at St James's had demanded a godfather be present, in addition to the two godmothers.

[15] Local baptism registers show that between 1932, by which time St Francis's church was available to residents, and 1940, 274 baptisms of children from the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates were held at five older parish churches in the town; between 1941 and 1950, there were 302; between 1951 and 1965, the figures dropped to 205. St James, Eve Hill, a church close to the new estates, was particularly popular with residents of the estate, possibly due to the willingness to baptise without stringent conditions and, according to one interviewee, to baptise illegitimate children (RPMSI, D25). Cf. also RPMSI, G4, where Mr Beddoe explains that his daughter was baptised at St James's, Lower Gornal, in 1966 despite his own background at Lake Street chapel and his wife's Roman Catholicism, because most members of their families were buried at St James's churchyard.

[16] e.g. RPMSI, D18, D24.

> before she was married, a lad, and he put his name and her wedding in *The Messenger.* I had a go at him. I said 'You put your own daughter's baby's name in, you didn't tell she'd had him before she was married, did yer?'[17]

The efforts of the Anglican churches to enforce a more serious attitude to baptism amongst parishioners was greeted with some hostility. Mrs Heath, a Wren's Nest resident, who had her daughter baptised in 1942 observed:

> I thought it was right to have it done. Right and proper. Well, it was in them days. But it's different now. The vicars ain't the same now. They've got to go to church now or they don't do it. I don't know![18]

The determination to have one's child baptised found ways of overcoming such obstacles, parents often taking children to the church of a neighbouring parish less insistent upon stringent rules.[19]

Incumbents of the Anglican churches in Dudley, perceiving a lack of understanding and gravity amongst parents in relation to baptism, first attempted to exercise some control over the meaning of, and access to, the sacrament during the 1930s. The incumbents at St Thomas's and St Edmund's insisted that baptisms be held only on Sundays and that parents give several days notice in order that they could be instructed in the meaning and importance of baptism.[20] Reverend Dr A.P. Shepherd, newly installed at Dudley in 1932, felt that:

> The baptism of infants is only justifiable on the ground that those who bring them to baptism realise what that rite means and undertake to teach the children whom they bring [...] in many cases there are no godparents, nor does there seem to be much understanding in some cases of what the service means.[21]

In 1944, Reverend J.L. Norden, incumbent at St Francis's on the Priory Estate, complained that parents had not the slightest idea about the vows they took in the baptism service, noting that children were brought to St Francis's for baptism whilst older siblings went to any chapel or nowhere. He informed parishioners that henceforth he intended to mark as Free Church any family whose children went to churches of other denominations and to refuse to baptise them.[22]

Five years earlier, the incumbent of St Edmund's had made a similar complaint about the trans-

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[17] RPMSI, G7.
[18] RPMSI, D18.
[19] e.g. *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, August 1939.
[20] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, December 1932; *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, October 1937.
[21] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, December 1932.
[22] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, July 1944.

or non-denominational approach of parents, refuting the argument of a female parishioner that any 'respectable person' should be able to be a Godparent, whether 'Non-conformist, Spiritualist or Jew'.[23]

Undenominational attitudes were common. The services of the Church of England were called upon by parents who were reared in, and sometimes still attended, Nonconformist churches. Sometimes this was simply a matter of convenience. A drop in the number of baptisms at St Francis's between 1938 and 1940 was attributable not only to the opening of St Christopher's church on the Wren's Nest Estate in 1939, but also to the opening a year earlier of the Priory Methodist church. Nonconformist parents who might otherwise have taken their infants to St Francis's out of convenience now took them to the Priory chapel, a preference which may have been reinforced during the incumbency of Reverend Norden (1940-44) who had a distaste for undenominational attitudes.

It was not always simply out of convenience, however, that Nonconformist parents took their infants to be baptised at the Church of England. The number of baptisms at Dudley Methodist churches was very small and some parents of a Nonconformist background chose the Anglican church as the venue for baptism. Mr Lewis, for example, whose parents were regular attenders at Vicar Street Methodist chapel, was baptised at St Thomas's church in the early 1930s. This was, he believed, because the Church of England was then held in very high esteem.[24] For some, this was again a matter of family tradition. Mr Savage, a lifelong attender at St James's Lower Gornal, observed that:

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[23] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, August 1939. Further efforts were made by incumbents of Dudley and Gornal churches during the 1950s and 1960s, following diocesan and national leads, to restrict access to baptism to residents of the parish or those on the electoral roll, to make the service more public by incorporation within Sunday services and to enforce a greater level of commitment amongst parents to the baptismal vows (see, for example, *St James, Lower Gornal, Parish* Magazine,November 1956; *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, April 1959 and December 1965; *St Luke's Parish Magazine*, June 1964). For diocesan initiatives see, for example, *Worcester Messenger*, September 1957 and November 1958, which outline the recommendations of the Convocation of Canterbury and York about baptism and confirmation. For the national debate, see Paul A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 61-4.

[24] RPMSI, D21. Also e.g. RPMSI, G30.

> Up 'til about 1939 practically everybody came to St James's for marriages and baptisms and for funerals. There's still a tremendous lot of Methodists that support the church because they have relatives buried in the churchyard.[25]

Mr Raybould, a fairly regular attender at Lake Street Methodist chapel, where his wife and all her family attended, generally had a distaste for the ritual of the high-church St James's, Lower Gornal, but felt that it offered a solemnity appropriate for the service which the Methodist chapels could not match:

> It's got to be more solemn. The chapel [...] it's got the font, but only on the table, not an altar. Oh yes, it's more Christianfied [*sic*] in a church than whatsit [i.e. chapel], to me anyway, and the wife.[26]

It was also popularly felt that baptism was the appropriate way to bestow a new identity, providing a setting and an occasion fitting for the seriousness of the transition into the beginnings of individual personality.[27] As Mrs Tomlins, an infrequent churchgoer of Lower Gornal, emphasised: 'it's nice to take a child to church or to chapel [...] It's nice to take a child to be christened to have its name in the house of God, I do believe in that'.[28] For Mrs Brooks, an occasional Methodist, the purpose of christening was 'naming really. Just to name the child and get the blessing of the church'.[29] The recognition by the church of the individual identity of the new infant was considered important. Mr Hammond, who has rarely attended church as an adult, commented that 'to be christened, you've been recognised by the church in as much as you're a being on this earth'.[30] So deeply ingrained in popular tradition was the observance of baptism, that some interviewees believed that it was a legal requirement, and the only means by which a child could officially be given a name.[31] As Mr Simpson responded, with some incredulity, 'Course I was christened, what do you think me bloody name is for?'[32]

To hold one's marriage service in church was also considered appropriate by the great majority of interviewees throughout the period, not only for the aesthetic and ceremonial benefits of a church wedding, but also as the only means of being properly married and

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[25] RPMSI, G27.
[26] RPMSI, G25.
[27] Cf. Edward Bailey, 'The Religion of the People', in Tony Moss (ed.), *In Search of Christianity* (1986), pp. 178-88. esp. p. 180.
[28] RPMSI, G29. Also RPMSI, D8 (Mrs Downing).
[29] RPMSI, G2.
[30] RPMSI, D16.
[31] RPMSI, G3 and D26.
[32] RPMSI, D24.

securing God's blessing.[33] Furthermore, there remained a strong distrust of civil marriages, and unease about the status of registry office weddings, to which a stigma was attached.[34]

God's blessing on the marriage was an important consideration for regular and irregular churchgoers, though again the strongest insistence usually came from women, occasionally in the teeth of male indifference or even opposition.[35] Mrs Griffiths, for example, had a lifelong aversion to registry office weddings, stating 'I shouldn't have felt married if it hadn't been either church or chapel. I think you need a place of God to get married'.[36] Several interviewees stressed that they had never believed that one is properly married in a registry office. Mrs Clark, an occasional attender at Lake Street chapel, married at St James's Lower Gornal in 1935 since, she claimed, Lake Street did not then have a licence.[37] She discounted the option, urged by her fiancé, of a registry office wedding: 'I said I'm not going to get married in the Registry Office. I dain't think it's a proper marriage'. The 'old ones' in the village, she recalled, used to say that a registry office wedding was not binding.[38] Others felt that the gravity of the vows taken in a church was a far surer guarantee of the longevity of a marriage.[39] Mrs Palmer, who was married at St Edmund's, referred to the setting of the church as an expression of the sanctity of marriage, providing a unique authenticity:

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[33] Olive Anderson has shown that the incidence of civil marriage in Victorian England was variable and dependent upon the strength or weakness of traditions of ecclesiastical marriage. The rate for the West Midlands at 23 civil per hundred of all marriages between 1844 and 1919 was precisely that for England and Wales as a whole (Olive Anderson, 'The Incidence of Civil Marriage in Victorian England and Wales', *Past and Present*, 69 (1975), pp. 50-87 (p.55)). Between 1914 and 1970 the percentage of marriages held in registry offices nationally increased from 24% to 40%, but by far the most rapid increase, from 30% to 40%, took place between the early 1960s and 1970 (W.S.F. Pickering, 'The persistence of rites of passage: towards an explanation', *British Journal of Sociology*, 25 (1974), pp. 63-78 (p. 65)).

[34] RPMSI, D8 (Mr Downing); RPMSI, D16.

[35] e.g. RPMSI, G1 and G4.

[36] RPMSI, D10. Cf. RPMSI, G12 (Mrs Grundy and Mrs Healey).

[37] In fact, Lake Street's marriage register begins in 1927, shortly after the new chapel was completed, but only 13 marriages were conducted there up to 1934 (Lake Street Marriage Register, 1927-34).

[38] RPMSI, G8. Cf. RPMSI, G29 (Mrs Tomlins).

[39] RPMSI, D28. The author cannot claim to have any data on divorce rates for the area, but in 1945 Reverend Shallcross of St James Lower Gornal decried the national increase in divorces and the apparent levity with which marriage was undertaken, before concluding, 'This one very big evil has scarcely touched us - the people of Lower Gornal' (*DH*, 11 August 1945).

> I don't think yon married [at a registry office] anyway [...] there's the font and all them lovely pictures, angels and all that, the big Bible's open on the Vicar's stand. You've nothing of that in the registry office.[40]

A church wedding was a mark of respectability and moral probity. Marriage at a registry office, on the other hand, was not believed to carry God's blessing, as Mrs Sankey observed:

> If you were married at a registry it was classed as being naughty as the saying is [...] That's what I say about registry offices now, I wouldn't feel that I was married properly. I would feel that I had sinned and therefore I couldn't go in church [...] Well it's God's house, isn't it?[41]

A belief that Divine providence had brought the betrothed together sometimes reinforced the sense that a church provided the only appropriate setting for the wedding, a means to seal a union desired by God. Mr Raybould, for example, whose wife's chapel was Lake Street Methodist, and whom he believed he was destined to marry despite the difficult circumstances of the War, explained that had a church wedding been impossible they would not have married.[42] The parish church was believed to be the appropriate setting amongst some from a Nonconformist tradition, like Mr Raybould and his wife, even after local chapels had obtained licences to hold marriages.[43] Even in the Gornals where special services such as the Sunday School Anniversary demonstrated the extent of the broader constituency of occasional Methodists, the parish church far outstripped the local Methodist chapels as the venue for marriages.[44]

The six cases of registry office marriages amongst the interview sample suggest that the decision not to marry in church was generally made for practical, rather than ideological, reasons.[45] Moreover, five of the six were marriages of residents of the Priory and Wren's Nest

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[40] RPMSI, D22.

[41] RPMSI, G2. Cf. RPMSI, D10.

[42] RPMSI, G25.

[43] RPMSI, G25. Cf. Mrs Tudor, whose husband considered the Zoar chapel in Gornal Wood 'his chapel' (though he rarely attended) but when, since they could not marry in the church of Mrs Tudor's choice, he was given the option he chose St James Lower Gornal as the venue for their marriage (RPMSI, D28).

[44] Between 1937 and 1965, the Anglican churches of St Peter and St James witnessed a combined total of 1436 marriage services; the four Methodist chapels, of the six in Gornal, for which registers were traced for the same period (Kent Street, Mount Zion, Five Ways and Lake Street) witnessed a combined total of 371 marriage services.

[45] RPMSI, D21, D23, D25, D30 and G26.

Estates whose attachment to their local churches was weak by comparison with the allegiance to the local church or chapel in areas of more established working-class communities. By contrast, in the Gornal villages, according to Mr Sankey of Lower Gornal, 'it was all church or chapel. I can't remember about anybody mentioning the registry office.' [46]

Special services

Occasional attendance was not confined to rites of passage. Annual services, such as Easter, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Harvest and the Sunday School Festival, also drew many infrequent attenders to their local churches and chapels. Such services consistently attracted congregations far outstripping the size of the ordinary Sunday congregations.

Easter services retained the power to draw to church many who rarely otherwise attended. For much of the inter-war period, in particular, the occasional conformity represented by taking Easter communion characterised a significant part of the town centre's wider constituency of worshippers. In 1933, for example, the vicar of St Thomas's commented in the parish magazine that 'amongst the large number of Easter communicants, many who draw near with such reverence and obvious appreciation of the Sacrament [..] use it so seldom'.[47] In 1960 the vicar of St Edmund's church could still note, rather more positively, the continued importance of taking Easter communion for many infrequent attenders:

> For some of them it is the one day in the year that they from habit cannot stay away. The Blessed Sacrament still draws them back to the Teaching that they received in their youth and which they cannot finally renounce.[48]

In the Gornal villages, the Anglican churches , St James's and St Peter's, sustained, and even increased, the numbers taking Easter communion. In 1955, Reverend Timms reported great throngs at the altar of St James's from 6am, and evidence of enthusiasm throughout the morning:

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[46] RPMSI, G2.
[47] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, May 1933.
[48] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, April 1960.

> As the 7am Mass finished, the queues waiting at both doors for the next Mass were in themselves a thrilling witness to the living power of the Master's Resurrection.[49]

Many, Timms added, had not attended again during the several weeks since Easter. In Gornal, the vicars at St James's and St Peter's were well-known in the local communities. Observance of the Easter communion duty was, for some occasional attenders, in addition to a religious duty, part of a tacit reciprocal relationship between church and community. Mr Banks recalled the importance of taking Easter communion for his father, a fruit-seller and occasional attender at St James's, Lower Gornal:

> They went on special occasions - didn't have time every Sunday with having six of us. They would go Easter time and the Anniversary [...] Dad loved Easter [...] and the vicar used to like him going to the front, to the altar rail to take communion.[50]

Easter, according to Mr Savage, a lifelong attender at St James's, was one occasion on which almost everybody associated with the church would attend.[51] The Gornal Methodist churches were, according to Mr Hudson, similarly packed with occasional attenders at Easter time.[52]

New Year's Eve and Christmas Eve midnight services, the latter introduced between the Wars, but featuring in many of the local Anglican churches only in the post-War years, proved widely popular.[53] During the First World War, Watch Night services at the parish church in Dudley attracted up to 170 communicants.[54] In 1921, the Dudley Free Church Council held a Watch Night service at King Street Wesleyan chapel and attracted a congregation of over 200.[55] The service remained popular in central Dudley, particularly with many inhabitants of the poorer quarters of the town who rarely otherwise attended church but left the pubs before midnight in order to do so, many feeling that to be in church was a good start to the year.[56]

At some local churches, the Watchnight service was not held for many years, and was sometimes deliberately omitted by clergy as unauthorised either by Scripture or tradition. In

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[49] *St James's, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, May 1955.
[50] RPMSI, G3.
[51] RPMSI, G27.
[52] RPMSI, G17.
[53] Cf. Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp.173-75.
[54] St Thomas, Dudley, Service Registers, 1913-1917.
[55] *DH*, 8 January 1921.
[56] e.g. Mrs Tudor, who attended with her husband, who otherwise hardly ever attended church (RPMSI, D28).

1951, Father Bebb of St Edmund's stated that he would not again hold New Year's Eve Watch Night services which, he felt, encouraged sentimental observances such as a belief in bad luck accruing from the failure to attend the service.[57] But the service remained popular with many. When it was introduced at St Francis's during the 1950s, it attracted large numbers.[58] Reverend Alan Hayward recalled that during the late 1950s many poured into the church from the Washington public house across the road at closing time, an expression, he believed, of a superstitious wish to secure good fortune for the coming year.[59]

Christmas Day and Christmas Eve services remained popular throughout the period, attracting large numbers of irregular as well as regular attenders. By the early 1960s a Festival of Carols and Goodwill run by the Salvation Army at the Town Hall had become an annual highlight in Dudley, becoming so popular that it was over-subscribed.[60] At the Dudley and Gornal Anglican churches, Christmas rivalled, and sometimes overtook Easter, in numbers of communicants. The introduction of a Christmas Eve Midnight service sometimes dramatically increased the number of communicants, as at St Peter's Upper Gornal in 1955, when there were 156 communicants, more than the total for Christmas Day over the past 40 years. The service was first introduced in the High Church churches of St Edmund's in Dudley and St James's in Lower Gornal, in 1928. It remained immensely popular throughout the period at St James's, doubling the number of Christmas communicants on its introduction by Father Shallcross in 1928, and thereafter attracting more communicants - sometimes three times as many - than Christmas Day in eighteen out of the twenty-two years up to 1964 for which there are surviving records.[61]

Such was the popularity of the Christmas Eve service in Dudley, particularly in the town centre churches, that by the late 1940s and early 1950s, clergy at St Thomas's and St

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[57] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, January 1951.

[58] The service registers indicate communicant figures of between 112 and 185 at the four Watch Night services held during the 1950s, a figure which would, of course, under-represent the total number attending.

[59] Personal communication between the author and Reverend Alan R. Hayward (Curate, St Christopher's, 1956-59). For Mr Simpson (RPMSI, D24) of the Wren's Nest Estate, the New Year Watch Night service was 'my main thing'.

[60] *DH*, 15 December 1961.

[61] St James's, Lower Gornal, Service Registers, 1914-31, 1941-47 and 1951-65.

Edmund's were concerned at the rowdy behaviour of the many attenders who came straight from the local pubs to the service.[62] Efforts were made to ensure more decorous behaviour, including sterner stewarding, locking doors after the beginning of the service, and separating communicants from non-communicants on entry to the church.[63] The result at St Edmund's church in 1948, for example, was a considerably smaller and more reverent congregation 'consisting almost entirely of our own people'.[64]

For some who attended, the appeal of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services was difficult to define: it was simply something very special.[65] Part of the attraction was the conviviality and cheeriness of the occasion, the strong sense of a 'Christmas spirit',[66] together with the attraction of familiar and enjoyable Christmas carols.[67]

The popularity of the Christmas services was also, however, an expression of the concentration, amongst a majority of both regular and irregular attenders, on the birth and life of Jesus, his humanity and his humanitarian teachings rather than his death and resurrection. Whilst Easter, according to the incumbent of St Edmund's in April 1963, 'separates believers from half-believers, at Christmas many indifferent to the Creeds can celebrate the birthday of the greatest Man Who ever lived'.[68] Christmas also enshrined and sanctified the miracle of birth (not necessarily of Virgin birth) and creation which underpinned basic theistic beliefs. As Mr Gould, a lifelong Dudley Anglican, observed in relation to his love for the Christmas services:

> It is literally to me personally anyway, still something absolutely wonderful and amazing about the concept of life being given. I still think it's amazing that we have our own two daughters [...] it's part and parcel, it's the creation, almost it's the start again. It's the wondrous thing of life [...] our faith revolves around creation.[69]

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[62] cf. RPMSI, G6 for the attraction of Christmas Eve Midnight Mass at St James Lower Gornal for those coming out of pubs and clubs.
[63] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, January 1947; St Thomas, Dudley, PCC Minutes, 29 September 1954; RPMSI, D5.
[64] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, January 1949.
[65] RPMSI, D8 (Mrs Downing) and D11.
[66] e.g. RPMSI, D23.
[67] RPMSI, D29 and G26.
[68] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, April 1963.
[69] RPMSI, D13.

Mrs Griffiths, a Sunday scholar at Wesley chapel as a child, but an infrequent attender as an adult, explained her habit of praying to Jesus by reference to his infanthood and humanity, and her own maternal feelings: 'being a mum you see, it's a baby and it's grown up'.[70]

Popular creationism also contributed to the success of Harvest Festival services. Their popularity in both Anglican and Nonconformist churches throughout the period is clear from Anglican service registers, from reports in parish and Free Church Council magazines and the local press (where accounts of overflowing services appeared year after year into the late 1960s) and from oral evidence.[71] Harvest homes, services held usually in public houses, were also popular in the Black Country from the 1920s and remained so throughout the period, with local ministers called upon to take short services.[72] By 1937 such was the popularity of these events that a local reporter simply stated that the 'Harvest Home season' was 'in full swing in clubs, pubs and churches throughout the region'.[73] They continued to draw large numbers into the War years and beyond, to the end of the period.[74]

Commentators in Dudley, noting the local popularity of Harvest services, sought to provide their own explanations in terms primarily of aesthetic gratification, imputing a spirit of thanksgiving only to a minority. A regular church affairs columnist for the *Dudley Herald*, wrote in 1921:

> many who seldom attend the ordinary services find their way to the festival. This may be, of course, due to curiosity and the desire to see the effect of the decorations. Some few of these

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[70] RPMSI, D10.

[71] See, for example, *DH*, 8 October 1921, 15 October 1927, 27 October 1945.; *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, November 1925 and November 1926; *St Francis and St Christopher Parish Magazine*, November 1943; *St James's Eve Hill Dudley Parish Magazine*, October 1957; *St James's, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, October 1955, November 1963; *St Peter's, Upper Gorna,l Parish Magazine*, November 1959; *The Messenger*, November 1968; St Thomas Service Register, 1965.

[72] The first local mention it has been possible to identify of 'Harvest Homes' - the practice of Harvest Festival services being held in pubs and clubs - was in the *DH* in September 1925 where it was claimed that the 'unique' practice of holding a Harvest thanksgiving with Harvest hymns was started by the laity a few years earlier in public houses in the village of Netherton to the south of Dudley (*DH*, 26 September 1925).

[73] *DH*, 9 October 1937.

[74] e.g. *DH*, 18 October and 15 November 1941, 16 October 1948, 27 October 1962. Mr Slater, of the Wren's Nest Estate, recalled the Harvest services at public houses without prompting, adding that 'every one used to go' (RPMSI, D26). In a letter to the author (9 October 1996), Reverend Perry Smith, Methodist minister in Gornal from 1956-61, vividly recalled pub harvests as a feature of the area which he had not met before.

> casual visitors perhaps look upon it as a duty they owe to Divine Providence for the fruits of the earth.[75]

A simple pleasure at the decorative effect of the Harvest services, and the familiarity of some favourite hymns, was undoubtedly part of the appeal. Mrs Clark, an occasional attender at Lake Street Methodist chapel, recalled the Harvest services with particular pleasure:

> Oh lovely. It was all decorated with fruit and loaves where the choir sat and wheat, and the choir used to sing some beautiful anthems.[76]

For some, the Harvest home in particular was a rare but much enjoyed opportunity to experience some contact with the formal rituals of Christian worship. Recalling his own role in the organisation of Harvest Home services at the Lower Gornal British Legion Club and Lower Gornal Social Club in the 1960s, Mr Beech provided a clear indication of the attractions of a warm, familiar and informal atmosphere and hearty singing of the Harvest hymns for those unaccustomed to, or uncomfortable with, services in churches and chapels:

> We always used to have the vicar [...] and he always used to stop and have a drink, the vicar from St James's, Elliott, he'd come over [...] We had a good organist [...] And it's a funny thing, when you're in church, whether it's for a funeral or wedding or what, you don't seem to be able to sing in church like you do in a club, it's funny. You're either too high or too low or something like that.[77]

Many Black Country working-class families had a small garden or allotment in which vegetables were grown and much of the produce at Harvest Festival services originated from these plots. The service tapped a rich vein of working-class culture, in so far as it drew on the competitive zeal which accompanied the cultivation of the allotment or garden.[78] In Dudley and Gornal, as elsewhere in the Black Country and beyond, horticultural shows and competitions were regular annual events and keenly supported, whilst success in the cultivation of one's garden or allotment was a regular topic of conversation at the local pub.[79] The Harvest Festival

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[75] *DH*, 1 October 1921.
[76] RPMSI, G8. Cf. RPMSI, G26, D14, D19 and D13 (Mrs Gould).
[77] RPMSI, G6.
[78] Ross McKibbin, 'Work and hobbies and Britain, 1880-1950', in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honur of Henry Pelling* (Cambridge,1983), pp. 127-46 (p.144).
[79] e.g. Mrs Beale's husband (RPMSI, G5).

was thus an annual opportunity to present the fruit of one's labour in a public arena.[80] As Mr Young of the Wren's Nest Estate recalled:

> they used to think they had got the best [vegetables], you know. And of course when it came to Harvest, they'd all be there in the morning.[81]

It was the same in the evangelical chapels of Gornal as in the Anglican churches of the new estates. Mr Hudson of Lower Gornal explained:

> Well, you've got the produce brought in. You get people who never come to church bring a cartload of onions or a bag of potatoes. We get it. You get people who grow the stuff. You get somebody come in that you've never seen before with a great big bunch of flower, chrysanths. [...] You'd never see them at any other time but they'd come in Harvest.[82]

The opportunity to decorate the local church with produce from one's own plot was therefore for many, in part at least, another chance to display and - implicitly - to compete with one's neighbour. In this sense, the complaint of the incumbent of St Edmund's in 1961 that the popularity of Harvest above that of Corpus Christi seemed 'to consecrate the mad materialism of this present age', was not without perception, but the suggestion two years later that the horticultural words of some of the harvest hymns were nonsensical in the context of Black Country society was less so.[83]

The Harvest service was also important, however, as an expression of two aspects of popular religious belief: first, that the parable of the Good Samaritan is fundamental to Christianity and second, that nature is expressive of God's creative powers.[84] That the produce was either given to the elderly, infirm or otherwise needy, or else auctioned, with the proceeds supporting some worthy cause, was an aspect of the service considered important by several interviewees.[85] The Harvest Festival was also, as one of the points at which the wonders of nature were celebrated within institutional religion, a vehicle for the expression of sentiments

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[80] Harvest Festival services attracted 18 of the 34 male questionnaire respondents when they were between the ages of 22 and 50, and 14 out of the 41 non-church members, both relatively high proportions. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the questionnaire.

[81] RPMSI, D30.

[82] RPMSI, G17.

[83] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, June 1961 and October 1963.

[84] Both of these aspects of popular belief are explored further in chapter 4.

[85] e.g. RPMSI, D28 and RPMSI, D30 (Mr and Mrs Young). In the post-War years, the definition of worthy causes as recipients of Harvest auction proceeds was, it seems, extended to incorporate the likes of local sports clubs (e.g. *DH*, 22 September 1951).

which approximated to a popular form of the argument from design, sentiments characteristic of both irregular and regular church-goers. Miss Hopkins, a lifelong Ruiton Congregationalist, made a direct connection between Harvest services and this popular argument from design:

> Well we can't deny God, can we? We had our Harvest service on Sunday. And gone through the hymns, there's so many truths you can't deny can you, that God made everything. You can't mention a thing, can you? And there's nothing that man can do different to what God gave him [...] I mean he can't create a thing, can he? [...] it's all been done before. [86]

The connection between the popularity of the Harvest service and the importance of beliefs in Divine creation is also illustrated by the simple explanation of Mr Simpson, a Wren's Nest Estate resident who only occasionally attended church as an adult: 'I went every time at Harvest Festival [I liked] the different sorts of stuff what's been grown and what God's created'.[87]

The supreme annual service in the local communities of Dudley and Gornal, however, was the Sunday School Anniversary, known in the Anglican churches as the Sunday School Festival. Like Harvest Festivals, Sunday School Anniversaries could guarantee full churches and chapels, often on two Sundays, as Repetition services were arranged to accommodate those who were unable to attend or gain access on the day. The Festival or Anniverary - or the Sunday the week before - usually involved a Procession around the parish or environs of the chapel, culminating either in a return to the church or an outdoor address in some open space, such as a market place, or park. The church or chapel services, particularly the popular evening service, included high levels of child participation, most famously in the Methodist chapels where the demand amongst children (usually girls) to be on the platform was such that children of larger families sometimes had to take turns in consecutive years.[88]

The numbers taking part in the processions and attending the services, children and adults, remained extraordinarily high throughout the period. In May 1914, for example, St Thomas's Sunday School Festival included two thousand children and two bands in its procession, one of the largest gatherings ever.[89] Two months later, the Sunday School

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[86] RPMSI, G14.
[87] RPMSI, D24. Cf. also RPMSI, G8.
[88] Questionnaire number 7; RPMSI, G5 and G8.
[89] *DH*, 20 May 1914.

Anniversary at Himley Road Wesleyan chapel in Gornal Wood filled the chapel to the uttermost well before the service began.[90] St Thomas's parish witnessed similar scenes sixteen years later: an enormous procession in the afternoon with 28 banners, parish residents throwing open their doors to watch, and a packed church in the evening.[91] Such was the anticipation with which parish residents awaited the annual event that plans to change the route taken by St Edmund's Procession of Witness in 1939 provoked protests and had to be abandoned.[92] The evening services of the Sunday School Festivals were well attended up to the end of our period attracting, in several churches, the largest congregations of the year and sometimes the largest for many years.[93] Methodist chapels, particularly in the Gornals, reported large congregations well into the 1960s,[94] whilst Father Charles Elliott of St James's Lower Gornal commented in 1962 that, 'It is clear that you love your Festival and your Children'.[95] Even the churches of St Francis and St Christopher on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates, where the efforts of ministers frequently met with relatively little success, and the church of St Luke in the town centre, suffering from the depopulation resulting from post-War slum clearances and the construction of the Russells Hall Estate, were able to report successful Sunday School Festivals in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The traditional Sunday School Festival was launched at St Francis's as soon as the church was completed in 1932 and met with immediate success.[96] Within six years, the evening services were so popular that not everybody could be accommodated.[97] By 1948, the Sunday School Festival was described as one of the pre-eminent events in the Parish for a long time, whilst record collections and a full church were reported in 1954 and 1955.[98] By the late 1950s, St Luke's was suffering a marked decline in the number of Sunday scholars owing to the

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[90] *DH*, 4 July 1914.

[91] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, June 1930 (see also July 1933 and July 1935 for similar reports). Similar reports of successful Sunday School Anniversaries and Festivals can be gleaned from parish magazines of all the Anglican churches concerned, from newspapers and from Nonconformist records throughout most of the period concerned.

[92] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, June 1939.

[93] e.g. *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, July 1959

[94] e.g. *The Messenger*, July 1963, May and August 1964.

[95] *St James's, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, June 1962

[96] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, June and July 1932 and July 1943.

[97] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, August 1938.

[98] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, August 1948, July 1954 and July 1955.

depopulation of the parish, following slum clearances.[99] Nevertheless, in 1960 the Sunday School Festival attracted a congregation of around 700 people and was considered by parishioners the best for many years.[100]

Not all clergy, however, were convinced of the religious value of the Festival, or that its importance was kept in perspective. Reverend J.L. Norden, incumbent of St Francis's during the early 1940s, was less than satisfied that an event tied to the local communal calendar could so far outstrip such red-letter days in the Christian calendar as Ascension and Whit, a concern shared by Reverend Paul Tongue, curate at St Edmund's at the end of the period, who recalled occasional attenders who sent their children to Sunday school:

> They kept coming back. Sunday School Festivals and the like can take over as the main Festival of the year, take over from Easter and what have you. Ridiculous![101]

In 1961, the Reverend A.T. Bartlett, incumbent of St Edmund's, urged that the Procession should be a genuine act of witness and added that he needed to be convinced that it was 'more than a spectacle to be watched by people who had much better be in the Church at Mass'.[102] Such concerns were not new. Struck by the popularity of the Sunday School Anniversaries, a local press correspondent in 1935 rejected the idea that this indicated an otherwise invisible strain of popular religiosity:

> This might be construed into an [*sic*] evidence that instinct in the hearts of the people is an innate religiosity which finds its most popular expression on these occasions. But the enthusiasm which these events engenders [*sic*] is more probably due to the part which the children themselves take.[103]

The pride in, and enjoyment of, watching the participating children was undoubtedly part of the attraction for adults.[104] The event was also eagerly anticipated by many children who enjoyed the opportunity to perform and the feeling of importance which it provided.[105] For children

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[99] St Luke's PCC Minutes, 16 March 1958.
[100] *St Luke's Parish Magazine*, August 1960.
[101] Interview with the author.
[102] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, June 1961.
[103] *DH*, 15 June 1935.
[104] e.g. RPMSI, G8 and G6.
[105] e.g. RPMSI, G3; Questionnaire number 6. According to Mr Grainger, who attended Sunday school at St James, Lower Gornal, to be on the platform was considered 'a great thing' (RPMSI, D12).

during the inter-war years, when material comforts were, for many, far from abundant, the Anniversary carried the additional attraction of new clothes, bought specially for the occasion.[106]

The Sunday School Anniversary was a form of entertainment, with excitement guaranteed by the enthusiasm of the children and enjoyment enhanced by a full chapel and hearty singing of well-known hymns. Anniversary afficionados, including many who were otherwise irregular churchgoers, attended Anniversary services at several chapels during the season between April and July,[107] and the responsibility of the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council to co-ordinate Anniversary dates was, in the view of several interviewees, its most important purpose.[108] The family of Mr Tranter, occasional Gornal Methodists, did the rounds of the Anniversaries, always making a point of attending Ruiton Congregational Anniversary, although they had no other connections there, as Mr Tranter recalled:

> It was - how can I put it? - it was supposed to be one of the best anniversaries going, kind of thing. If you could call it, show-wise. They always said it was the best one, as far as singing and things like that was concerned.[109]

For many, moreover, the Sunday School Anniversary, was the annual opportunity to express a general commitment to the churches and chapels of the area and a personal and family allegiance to one church or chapel in particular. It was not only through attendance that such an allegiance was expressed, but also through generous donations. A regular columnist in the *Dudley Herald*, wrote in 1917:

> There is no more striking feature in the progress of the Free Church than the amount of money raised at Sunday School Anniversaries.[110]

Twenty-five years later the same was true:

> It would be difficult to find an area of equal size in the whole of England where this festival is entered into with such enthusiasm [...] The Sunday School Anniversary is a very important part of the life of Gornal folk, whether members of the church or not, and they give liberally not only in support of their own, but other churches too.[111]

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[106] e.g. RPMSI, G8, G14 and G2 (Mrs Brooks).
[107] e.g. the parents of Mr Beech (RPMSI, G6).
[108] e.g. RPMSI, G18 and G5.
[109] RPMSI, G28.
[110] *DH*, 1 September 1917.
[111] *DH*, 3 July 1943.

In the Gornal Methodist chapels the amounts raised on Sunday School Anniversaries exceeded by far those raised at any other annual event, whilst Sunday School Anniversary and Festival collections in Anglican churches in Gornal and in churches and chapels in Dudley were consistently amongst the largest of the year. The amounts collected varied from chapel to chapel depending on the size and social constituency of the congregations (the greatest being at the Zoar chapel), but individual contributions sent to the Treasurer were assiduously recorded, and totals published as part of the annual accounts. The private records of the Treasurer of Wesley chapel, Kent Street Upper Gornal, together with the annual Sunday School statements of accounts, from the early 1940s, show that between 1940 and 1965, between fifty and one hundred and fifty private donations (as opposed to the collection plate on the day) were made each year for the Sunday School Anniversary. Many donations were made in memory of somebody, presumably a parent, spouse or even child, suggesting that the Sunday School Anniversary was an annual opportunity for the community of the chapel to reinforce its bonds through time as well as in current festivity, drawing past and present together, reinforcing familial allegiances and re-asserting the role of the chapel in the construction of personal and family identities.[112]

The Anniversary was explicitly and deliberately nostalgic. As a writer in Wesley chapel's newsletter commented in 1958, the Anniversary was 'a yearly reminder of happy childhood days and of the work of one's forefathers, as well as a reminder of all the work done for the young in the church'.[113] Six years later, the correspondent of Kent Street chapel, Upper Gornal, similarly noted the nostalgia of the Anniversary. 'These kind of services bring to us memories,' the correspondent wrote, 'and much happiness'.[114] Hymns were sung which parents themselves had learnt at Sunday School and which, oral evidence suggests, frequently remained lifelong favourites.[115] In Gornal, the reinforcement of familial and communal connections

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[112] Register of Sunday School Anniversary Contributions to the 'Wesley' Chapel, Upper Gornal, 1958-1971 and earlier loose Sunday School Accounts inside Sunday School Anniversary advertisements.
[113] *Wesley News*, June 1958.
[114] *The Messenger*, August 1964.
[115] e.g. 'Tell Me the Old, Old Story', a favourite of, for example, Mrs Richards (RPMSI, D23; see, for example, *St Luke's Parish Magazine*, August 1962).

through the generations on the day of the Anniversary was also effected through the local custom of scrubbing family gravestones in the two main village graveyards of Ruiton Congregational chapel and St James's Lower Gornal, a tradition which, it was reported, went back to at least the mid-nineteenth century, and which continued up to, and beyond, the end of the period under study.[116] Mr Tranter recalled the custom from his visits to Ruiton Anniversary:

> when we come out of the service, we come out and we all walked round the graveyard looking at the graves. And previously to the Anniversary, the week before everybody used to go up there and clean all the graves [...] And we should go all round the churchyard, we should spend the night in the churchyard. 'Oh so-and-so and so-and-so'. You should know somebody that was buried there.[117]

Thus Sunday School Anniversaries served to consolidate the enduring kinship, neighbourhood and community ties of the traditional working-class areas of the Gornals. They were also, however, partly expressions of a particularist local patriotism. Each chapel had its own traditions and the six chapels co-existed through a combination of co-operation and competition. The local patriotic pride of the Gornal villages was cut through by an equally intense pride in one's chapel, extending beyond the circle of members and regular attenders to those who had connections through former Sunday School attendance, or through a family relationship to past or present members.[118] At Ruiton Congregational, the antiquity of the Sunday school - adherents proudly claim it predates that of Robert Raikes - combined with the splendour of the Anniversary to generate considerable local pride and an important component of the village's identity. Mrs Hood, a lifelong adherent of the chapel, claimed:

> I think our church was a bit unique. We always thought we had the best Sunday School Anniversary in the country [laughs]. And we did. And you know, it was. And we'd got a balcony. And you know those stairs, on top there's a flat roof and they were even sitting on chairs on there. Everywhere packed. Down the aisles was packed.[119]

The particularist pride of the local chapels was expressed in the zeal with which they attempted to excel one another in the amounts collected on anniversaries, congregations sometimes being kept back at the end of the last service of the day whilst the takings were

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[116] *DH*, 14 May 1955 and 21 July 1962. Also RPMSI, G2.
[117] RPMSI, G28.
[118] 51 out of the 67 questionnaire respondents born in Gornal described family tradition as important or very important in their adherence to a particular church or chapel. 6 did not answer the relevant question at all. Thus the true figure is 51 out of 61 (84%).
[119] RPMSI, G15.

counted and then asked to give again if the collection fell short of what was expected or of what was known to have been collected at another chapel.[120] The amounts collected included, at the Nonconformist chapels, donations made throughout the year towards the Sunday school, but the totals were nonetheless remarkable. Between 1948 and 1965, for example, Zoar chapel's Sunday School Anniversary collections always totalled between £375 and £425. The Repetition service produced the next largest collection of the year (often over £40), whilst Harvest Festival and Trust Anniversary services lagged some considerable way behind.[121] Mr Garner, who moved to Sedgley in the 1950s and for some time attended a Methodist chapel on Sedgley High Street, recalled tales which circulated locally:

> it was always the tradition to announce it during the service, before the service had ended. People wanted to know how much had been made on the day [...] and there are stories of the Gornal churches having to announce a decrease on the previous year [...] and another hymn being sung and the plate being passed round again, to get more collection, until the amount of the previous year was exceeded. So this went on apparently, even by people who were somewhat detached from the church. *Their* church or *their* chapel had to have the most money. Such rivalry![122]

The Anniversary collections were the subject of lively conversation at local workplaces, as Mr Sankey recalled:

> I worked in the Co-op up the road there [laughs] and after the Anniversaries when the people come in, the topic was, 'Oh didn't the Zoar do well, I bet the Wesleyan won't beat that!' [laughs] Oh aye, oh yes![123]

The donations of parents at the Anniversary and their support of the service by annual attendance were also regarded as a religious duty, a practical expression of the firm belief that a religious education was fundamentally important in the up-bringing of children and of ensuring that the religious inheritance would be passed on to their own children by annually guaranteeing the financial security of the Sunday School. So widespread was this belief that it secured support for the Anniversaries and Festivals, and for the Sunday schools themselves,

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[120] e.g. RPMSI, G1, describing such an occurrence at Ruiton in the late 1930s. Correspondence papers from Zoar chapel include a letter of 1960 from America, informing the recipient of a bequest of £1700 from a former Zoar attender who 'loved Zoar Sunday school anniversaries and held Zoar and its friends in his heart' (Zoar Correspondence, 1955-67).

[121] Trustees Annual Meeting Reports, 1948-65.

[122] RPMSI, G11.

[123] RPMSI, G2.

even where there was little sense of community or family identity linked to local churches and chapels, as on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates.

Sunday school continued to be experienced by a vast majority of English children throughout the first two thirds of the twentieth century. Anglican and Methodist Sunday schools in Dudley and Gornal attracted large numbers throughout the interwar years, in particular.[124] At the beginning of the period, Sunday school numbers at churches in central Dudley were well in excess of the numbers attending adult services, even at many of the special services. St Luke's boasted 500 scholars on its register in 1914, whilst in 1920 St Thomas's, the parish church of the town, had 650 on its books, 40 teachers and an average of 250 meeting every Sunday afternoon.[125] The sixteen Nonconformist chapels affiliated to the Dudley Free Church Council in 1916 had a total of 3,373 Sunday scholars on their registers, representing nearly 23% of all children between the ages of 4 and 16 in the borough of Dudley in 1921.[126] Wesley chapel alone claimed over 600 Sunday scholars in 1914 and had between 400 and 500 on their registers throughout the 1920s.[127]

In Gornal at the beginning of the century, three of the Methodist chapels together mustered over 1000 Sunday scholars, with Zoar chapel in Gornal Wood boasting 550 on its register.[128] For much of the interwar period, St James's Lower Gornal had a regular Sunday afternoon gathering of 150 children in the Sunday school.[129] In 1939, the Gornal section Methodist minister, Reverend Dean Sheriff, claimed that well over 90% of eligible children in the villages were attending Sunday school, with Methodist registers alone totalling around 1300. It was, claimed Sheriff, 'no exaggeration to say that practically every man and woman

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[124] For the popularity of Sunday School in the nineteenth and twentieth centures, see Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church Part II*, 2rd edition (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), p. 257; Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society*, pp. 80-1 and 95-6; Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey', pp. 190-96; Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990* (1991), pp. 104-06. In 1957 90% of a Gallup poll sample had attended Sunday school; 73% had attended regularly (George H. Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975, Volume 1, 1937-1964* (New York, 1976), pp. 403-07).

[125] *DH*, 25 April 1914. These figures included a small mission church in Tetnal Street, Dudley.

[126] *DH*, 9 December 1916; *Census of England and Wales 1921, County of Worcester* (1923), p. 31, table 13. The sixteen chapels comprised 3 United Methodist, 3 Congregationalist, 4 Wesleyan, 1 Baptist, 1 Presbyterian, 3 Primitive Methodist and 1 Salvation Army.

[127] Wesley Leaders' Meeting Minutes, 1911-31.

[128] G&SFCC Minutes, 1906.

[129] RPMSI, G27.

had been connected with church or Sunday school during some period of their lives'.[130] The Anglican churches on the new Priory and Wren's Nest Estates, although failing to pick up many of the children who had moved from the older parts of town and lost their Sunday school habit, had between 500 and 600 on their Sunday school registers during their early years in the mid- to late 1930s.[131] Although numbers declined during the post-War years, Sunday school remained a common experience, if on a less regular basis and for shorter periods, for large numbers of children and some local Sunday schools still had hundreds on roll until the end, or very near to the end of the period.[132]

Sarah Williams has argued that sending one's children to Sunday school, for many in Southwark, was considered to be attendance 'by deputy'.[133] Similar beliefs coloured the attitudes of Dudley and Gornal inhabitants throughout much of the period 1914-65. In some cases, the time-consuming duties of child-rearing and, in the case of Mr Grainger, a tailor who moved from Gornal to the Broadway on the edge of the Priory Estate, of looking after his sick wife, were such that the children were regarded as the family representatives at church when it was difficult to attend oneself:

> I was looking after the wife, and working and was a long way away [from St James's Lower Gornal]. That was the reason for the relaxation there. But my children, ***they*** used to go to Sunday school.[134]

Many interviewees, whether their parents were regular attenders or not, added that they were made to attend Sunday School, mother usually enforcing the rule.[135] Mrs Carter, for example, whose parents were occasional attenders at St Thomas's, before being moved to the Wren's Nest Estate, recalled her mother's insistence:

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[130] *DH*, 4 February 1939.

[131] St Francis Incumbent's Correspondence and Statistics, 1935-9.

[132] One of the two Methodist chapels in Upper Gornal, for example, still had 277 on roll in 1962 (Sunday School Register, 1961-2). Others, however, which had been large at the beginning of the period had shrunk to a fraction of their former size, often largely, though not exclusively, as a result of town centre depopulation: St Thomas's Sunday school mustered a total of just 70 children by 1965 (*St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, October 1965). For a discussion for the reasons for declining attendance, see chapter 7.

[133] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', chapter 6 (esp. pp. 250-51).

[134] RPMSI, D12.

[135] e.g. RPMSI, D1, D30, G1, G6, D24, D27, G3, G9, G14, G15 (Mr and Mrs Hood), G22, D22 and G6.

> I never heard them say like as they went to church themselves [...] they liked us to go to Church, to Sunday School [...] Well, I think it was mostly mother. She was the one that liked to think, like, that we was going to church.[136]

Residents of the new estates were not universally indifferent to their children's religious education, some evidently being keen that they attend Sunday school, though often less actively insistent that they did so. In 1946, for example, an initiative of Vicar Street Methodist Sunday school's superintendent to attract children from the new estates met with great enthusiasm from at least some local parents: within two weeks an additional 86 children from the estates were attending Vicar Street Sunday school, transport being provided by a special bus service.[137] Towards the end of the period, the erection of the Russells Hall Estate to the south-west of the town from the late 1950s left a large population without the services of a local church until the construction of St Barnabas's in 1966. A survey carried out by Wesley chapel, however, found that although 198 of the 314 children in the homes visited did not attend any Sunday school, the explanation provided by most parents was that existing schools were too far away; 110 children were said to be willing to attend a Methodist Sunday school if one were started on the estate, whilst a further 40 would consider doing so, even though only 60 of the 335 homes visited on the estate had any Methodist connections.[138]

As in Southwark, denomination was often considered unimportant amongst Dudley and Gornal residents. Convenience and children's preferences based on friendships were more important. The attitude of Mrs Scott, an occasional attender at St James's Lower Gornal, was typical. Her daughter attended St James's Sunday school but her son attended Zoar, where most of his friends went:

> As long as he went somewhere, I didn't mind, no, no.
>
> Q. But you were Church of England?

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[136] RPMSI, D4.
[137] *DH*, 26 January 1946.
[138] Russells Hall Estate Survey, Report on First Analysis.

> Yes, always been church, never been chapel. As long as they went somewhere and it was a place of worship. And he never brought me a minute's trouble [...] As long as they go somewhere.[139]

It was not simply a case of gaining a short period of peace for adults, although such considerations were often present.[140] Many interviewees explained their infrequent Sunday attendance as adults partially, or wholly, in terms of the responsibilities and the time involved in child-rearing.[141] In the more established communities and for a time on the new estates, there was also some sense that the failure to send one's children to Sunday school was not quite respectable. Mr Lewis, born in central Dudley before his family moved to the Wren's Nest Estate, claimed that 'parents more or less sent us to keep up with the Joneses sometimes' and recalled sensing in childhood that families of children who did not attend Sunday school were slightly inferior:

> It was the recognised thing to go to Sunday school, and if you did not go - which was in a minority, there wasn't many that didn't send their children even if their mum and dad didn't go to school, they sort of made up their point of view to send the children - they could be [...] looked down on [...] only slightly, but enough to make them feel a bit out of place.[142]

Some interviewees, however, explicitly said that they felt that it was more important for children to be involved in church than adults, and believed that in this respect they mirrored the attitudes of their parents.[143] Moreover, sending one's children to Sunday school was regarded as the fulfilment of the christening vows, whilst christening itself was believed to provide a passport for later Sunday school attendance. Mrs Tudor explained:

> Well, I thought maybe as they'd go to Sunday School, which they did go to Sunday School, but they didn't keep it up. But I mean give them a good start, I think every child should be taught.[144]

Local clergymen emphasised the importance of children's involvement in church but were frustrated by the attitude that sending children to Sunday school was the limit of a parents' religious duties. An article in the parish magazine of St Peter's Upper Gornal in 1956 complained:

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[139] RPMSI, G26. Similar accounts of children attending Sunday Schools of denominations other than those of their parents were provided by several interviewees (e.g. RPMSI, G4, G5, G8and D21).
[140] e.g. Mrs Tomlins (RPMSI, G29),
[141] e.g. RPMSI, D28, D12, D14, G5 and G15 (Mrs Hood).
[142] RPMSI, D21.
[143] e.g. RPMSI, D1, G8, D28 and G2 (Mr and Mrs Sankey).
[144] RPMSI, D28.

> It is not sufficient to send your child to Sunday School and to Morning Worship. It is a parent's duty to come to the worship of the Church to which they have hitherto sent their children.[145]

Two years later similar comments were made in response to the usual high turnout for the Children's Festival:

> All too often, in my experience, I have found that parents willingly send their children to Sunday School, but do not ever consider that the Church is there for them too.[146]

However, Sunday School provided an important and lasting grounding in religious education. Few interviewees claimed to have learnt much from the religious education they received at day school, referring rather to their Sunday school teaching as the source of their early religious values and beliefs which, in many cases, they have retained throughout their lives.[147]

In most cases, this was despite, rather than because of, the quality of the teaching. By the beginning of the period, some local Sunday schools had already introduced, or were considering, institutional reforms of the sort implemented elsewhere in the country, resulting from awareness of the improvements in day schooling from the 1870s and of the insights offered by educational psychology.[148] These included the grading of classes by age groups, books of lesson schemes and regular training of teachers.[149] Regular visitation of scholars was also encouraged, and canvassing for new scholars was occasionally undertaken during the inter-war period.[150]

Such changes did not, however, iron out a considerable degree of amateurism, a problem exacerbated by a shortage of volunteers during the War.[151] The need for teachers was

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[145] *St Peter's Church Parish News*, February 1956.

[146] *St Peter's Church Parish News*, June 1958.

[147] Chapter 4 considers evidence of popular religious beliefs deriving from Sunday school teaching.

[148] See S.J.D. Green, 'The Religion of the Child in Edwardian Methodism: Institutional Reform and Pedagogical Reappraisal in the West Riding of Yorkshire', *Journal of British Studies*, 30 (October 1991), pp. 377-98. For local changes see, for example, Dudley United Methodist Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 7 April 1913.

[149] Several interviewees provided accounts of such schemes in their churches (e.g. RPMSI, D13, D17)

[150] Dudley United Methodist Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1 October 1917; Dudley Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 10 March 1937 and 9 March 1938.

[151] See, for example, Dudley Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1 March 1940 and 8 March 1941.

such that recruits for primary departments were drawn from those reaching the age at which they left Sunday school, usually girls, who were often given little, if any, training for the role and, in many cases, were left to their own devices. Mrs Mason, born in 1908, became a Sunday school teacher as a young woman at Five Ways chapel, Lower Gornal, but received no guidance or training:

> Well, we used to have to make the lesson up [...] We were supposed to read a little bit, pick one of stories from the Bible and talk about it and try to bring in something that was in keeping with it, say like the talents or anything like that, you could make it up in that way. I don't say I was a jolly good teacher [...] None of them used to tell you how to start or anything.[152]

Such an approach was not confined to village Methodist chapels. Mrs Beattie, born in 1915, became a Sunday School teacher at St Thomas's, Dudley, in her late teens. She received no training, had no teaching notes to follow and claimed not even to prepare lessons, but to improvise: 'whatever it was would come naturally'.[153]

Sunday school was, to a large extent, a vehicle for the transmission of significant facets of the popular religious repertoire. Recollections of Sunday school were commonly focused on biblical stories, particularly the person of Jesus, a 'love thy neighbour' (and family) Good Samaritan ethic, the difference between right and wrong, hymns, prayer, and the personalities of the teachers themselves.[154] Mr and Mrs Smart, Priory Estate residents as children during the 1930s, recalled the person of Jesus being at the centre of their Sunday schooling at St Francis's:

> Mrs: About Jesus and the Cross, more than anything [...]
> Mr: You learnt a lot about Jesus Christ and the Bible, and prayer and things like that, you know.[155]

Mr Slater's recollections of Sunday school at St James's, Lower Gornal and St Luke's, Dudley were similar: 'Oh, about Moses and Jesus and the fish and his disciples'.[156] Mr Lewis recalled

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[152] RPMSI, G22.

[153] RPMSI, D1. Cf. Mr Davis, of Lower Gornal, taught for a short time at Rehoboth Baptist chapel in Lower Gornal as a young man immediately after the Second World War, despite already being religiously agnostic (RPMSI, G9).

[154] Many of these themes echo closely those identified by Williams, 'Religious Belief', pp. 238-48, the structure of which proved helpful in the organisation of my own material.

[155] RPMSI, D25.

the Sunday school teaching at St Christopher's and the Priory Methodist church on the Wren's Nest Estate:

> The main thing at Sunday school, which was the main teaching of Christ, was love, to love one another, they always seemed to emphasise that. And I think that was very important, to love one another [...] Being taught the love of Christ, love of parents (parents was always number one, you must always love your parents).[157]

Mr Latham recalled a similar emphasis on love from his Sunday schooling at Lake Street:

> You had to love one another and be kind to one another. Play nicely, was a phrase that was often used when I was a kid.[158]

An ethic of love and forgiveness in human relations was encouraged by relevant stories from the Bible. The stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal son were recalled as ones which cropped up time and again at Sunday school. Mrs Tudor, Mrs Jones and Mrs Causer all named the stories as favourites formed during their Sunday schooling at, respectively, St Thomas's, Kent Street Methodist Upper Gornal and St Francis's.[159]

This ethic was complemented by a moral code, based around the Ten Commandments and, particularly in Methodist Sunday schools, upholding social purity through the established prescriptions against anti-social, sinful behaviour: drinking, gambling and fighting. Such teaching often left a general sense that fundamental to a Christian life was the observance of certain forms of behaviour and the avoidance of others. Mr Tranter, who attended Zoar Methodist Sunday school stated firmly: 'I took away from my Sunday School days a belief not to do wrong intentionally'.[160] Mrs Richards, who attended Sunday school at St Francis's and at St John's Christian Spiritualist church in Dudley, absorbed similar teachings:

> We was taught as Christians you knew right from wrong and you knew what to do, how to do it, where to do it. [161]

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[156] RPMSI, D26. Cf. also the recollections of Mr Davis, Mrs Hood, Mrs Palmer and Mrs Richards of their Sunday schooling at, respectively, Rehoboth Baptist chapel Gornal, Ruiton Congregational chapel, St Edmund's Dudley and St Francis Dudley (RPMSI, G9, G15, D22 and D23).
[157] RPMSI, D21.
[158] RPMSI, G21.
[159] RPMSI, D28, G19 and D6.
[160] RPMSI, G28. Also RPMSI, G15 and D17.
[161] RPMSI, D23.

Even those who subsequently experienced conversions acknowledged the moral value of their Sunday schooling. Mr Latham's Lake Street Sunday schooling substantiated his mother's brief homily:

> What I did understand was that you didn't swear, didn't fight, go drinking, get drunk, gamble [...] Oh yes, you knew what was right and what wrong. My mum used to say - and I used to say it with my lad - 'Badness leads to sadness', she'd say.[162]

Mrs Wesley, a lifelong attender at Five Ways Methodist chapel who was also later converted, recalled a similar emphasis from Sunday school:

> Well I think it taught us standards that we have lived by ever since. Right from wrong and do to others as you would they do to you, sort of thing.[163]

Other enduring recollections of Sunday school included hymns and prayers, these components in particular often providing the basis for nostalgic memories, reinforced by adult practices of prayer and singing, or listening to, familiar hymns. For Mr Bedford, Mrs Causer, Mr Slater and Mrs Palmer who all attended Anglican Sunday schools in Dudley, hymn-singing was vividly and pleasurably recalled.[164] For Mrs Causer, now a regular attender at St Francis's, recollections of the enjoyment of Sunday school were crucial to her decision to return to church after several years totally cut off from any involvement in institutional religion.[165]

Enjoyment of weekly Sunday School, however, was not the only inducement to attend. Regular attendance at Sunday school was encouraged by periodic prize-giving ceremonies and the excitement of the annual outing. Sunday school prizes, kept as family heirlooms, evoke both a nostalgic response and a keen sense of their importance during childhood. Mr Hughes, whose father was Sunday school secretary at Kent Street Methodist Upper Gornal, recalled the seriousness of prize-giving:

> There was Prize Day and I know when my father did the prizes how difficult it was to decide whether in fact you should give a First Class prize to somebody who'd lost 6 marks and the deadline was 5 marks. But I mean you got books - the only books that some kids had were their Sunday school prizes.[166]

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[162] RPMSI, G21.
[163] RPMSI, G30.
[164] RPMSI, D3, D6, D26 and D22.
[165] RPMSI, D6.
[166] RPMSI, G18.

Mrs Childs, who attended Mount Zion Methodist Sunday school in Upper Gornal during the financially stringent interwar years, recalled the importance of the Sunday school prizes:

> I've got all my hymn books. The only way we had our hymn-book was through getting them as Sunday school prizes, the same with the Bible.[167]

Such prizes were not always religious books. Older children were often given a choice and allowed to have, for example, works of classic fiction. Frequently, however, prizes consisted of Bibles, New Testaments, Christian stories, hymn books and prayer books, and these were invariably the prizes which became family heirlooms. Mrs Mason, a lifelong attender at Five Ways Methodist chapel, recalled:

> Most of them were Bible stories to begin [...] and they gave us the book prize for going to Sunday school. Of course, we went morning and afternoon then and had to get so many marks or else you didn't get a prize and we learnt about those who were Christians and went off as - what do you call them? - to other countries [...] those sort of books first, and as I got older there were love stories and that sort.[168]

The appropriate Sunday school prize, however, was considered by many to be a Bible, or other religious book. Mrs Richards, a Wren's Nest Estate resident born in 1941, recalled with approval her mother's attitude:

> And when we had prizes at Sunday school, we always said have a Prayer Book or have a Bible, or something like that. Mum used to say 'I can buy you the other books you want'.[169]

Prize-giving was also a special day. Mr Tranter recalled:

> The prize-giving day when you had your books that was a main day and that was a proud day if you won a book. And you had to be a regular attendant and your name was written in the book.[170]

Prize-giving was, at some churches, held on Mothering Sunday, when large gatherings of parents, otherwise infrequent attenders, enjoyed their children's successes.[171] Regular attendance, and its recognition in the prize-giving, was taken seriously by parents as well as children. In 1958, for example, the system for determining the regularity of attendance at St Peter's Upper Gornal was challenged by some parents, who felt it was unfair, penalising those

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[167] RPMSI, G7.
[168] RPMSI, G22.
[169] RPMSI, D23.
[170] RPMSI, G28.
[171] See, for example *St Peter's, Upper Gornal, Parish Magazine*, April 1962.

who could not attend due to sickness, and new arrangements were swiftly implemented to address the grievance.[172]

For many children between the wars, and before the spread of the motor car, the Sunday school outing was a rare treat. The regularity with which such outings were recalled with great fondness by interviewees emphasises the extent to which such childhood activities served to enshrine the associational culture of the Sunday School as a salient point within the fond memories of childhood. Albert Sargent, for example, recalled a Sunday School outing from St James's church, Lower Gornal, in 1919, when the children were taken to the nearby beauty spot of Kinver, a regular destination. His account is coloured by a combination of great excitement and adventure, respect for the learning of the curate, sentimental religiosity expressed through joyful singing and exuberant humour.[173] Such memories served to associate religion with childhood happiness, innocence and security in the context of the authority and venerability of its adult representatives.

The authority of Sunday school teaching and the enjoyment of the experience was reinforced by personal ties between teacher and scholar. Sunday school teachers were recalled with considerable emotional warmth, sometimes in familial terms.[174] When the long-time Senior Class teacher, Miss Ainsbury, was lost to Wesley Sunday school in 1944, the Sunday school minute book recorded that the absence of her personal touch had had a bad effect on the class.[175] Mrs Griffiths, who attended Wesley Sunday school as a child, was brought up by a stern Victorian grandmother. Her Sunday school teachers served emotionally as surrogate parents. The Superintendant, Mr Round, was recalled most fondly of all:

> The school teachers. You looked up to them. They were nice and kind. As I was pushed around, it was nice to have somebody who loved me [...Mr Round] was lovely, he was like a godfather. I can always remember him seeming old. I remember him coming up the drive and we would be playing around the gravestones and we would all rush down to him, like the Pied Piper.[176]

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[172] *St Peter's Parish Magazine*, April 1958.

[173] *BCB*, October 1981. Several interviewees recalled the Sunday school outing with particular fondness (RPMSI, D8, D12, G22 and G30).

[174] e.g. RPMSI, G7. Occasionally a Sunday school teacher was recalled in less favourable terms as 'battle-axes' or unduly strict (e.g. RPMSI, D13 (Mrs Gould)), but such recollections were far outweighed by more nostalgic recollections.

[175] Rose Hill [Wesley] Sunday School Minute Book, January 1944.

[176] RPMSI, D10.

Mrs Tudor, who attended St Thomas's Sunday school, experienced a childhood split between her parents and her grandparents and enjoyed the warmth of the contact with her Sunday school teacher, a relationship still cherished and symbolised by a confirmation gift:

> I used to like to go because I was very fond of the Sunday School teacher [...]
>
> Q. What did you like about her?
> I don't know, just motherly and that, you know [...] And I remember I was really upset when I stopped going and I heard about her dying. I was really upset [...] I've still got a little prayer book which she bought me, when I got confirmed, I've still got it at home.[177]

The loving respect for Sunday school teachers may well have been partly a response to the gentility of the middle-aged and middle-class. Mrs Tudor's much-loved Sunday school teacher was an infant day school teacher in Dudley nearing retirement, Mrs Griffiths' favourite, Mr Round, was a member of a local family which owned a building firm, whilst the Miss Guests, Sunday school teachers at Himley Road Methodist chapel, recalled by Mrs Beale as 'lovely' were school teachers at Robert Street school, Lower Gornal.[178]

Nevertheless, even young and working-class teachers could generate strong emotional ties with young Sunday school children, and their absence could be sorely missed. Mr Lewis recalled the loss of a teacher at St Christopher's, who died aged 21: 'For the kiddies in the class, there was a big emptiness in our lives, because she was lovely'.[179] In Gornal, where neighbourhood and chapel communities often over-lapped to a great extent, quasi-familial ties with Sunday school teachers could be reinforced by working-class neighbourhood ties. For example, Mrs Childs' Sunday school teacher at Mount Zion Upper Gornal - her 'other mother' - lived across the road from her own family in Pale Street.[180]

The majority loosened their ties with the church as they reached the last year of Sunday school, not because there was no group to effect the transition from Sunday school to church,[181] but because it was expected amongst families where parents were not regular committed church-goers and because there was an expectation that one's time would be taken up with the

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[177] RPMSI, D28.
[178] RPMSI, G5.
[179] RPMSI, D21.
[180] RPMSI, G7.
[181] In fact, throughout much of the period the majority of local Anglican and Methodist churches and chapels in Dudley and Gornal had young men's or young women's Bible Classes, junior churches and catechism classes to retain teenagers and prepare them for membership or confirmation.

adult concerns of earning a living and courting.[182] Parents who had insisted on attendance at Sunday school no longer expected their children to attend once they had left school and started work. Mr Hall, the son of a Gornal miner, observed:

> Most families were brought up that way [to attend church or chapel]. They went to church as they went to day school. They believed they should go to church until old enough to think for themselves. Some carried on throughout their lives, some til their late teens.[183]

In addition, the workplace provided a new social circle, reinforcing the tendency to 'fall away' from church.[184]

The pattern was recognised by clergymen and leaders in the local churches. Some noted it with concern and tried to find means to remedy the teenage drift from church:

> A deep feeling arises in many young minds that school is a thing of childhood days now past and done with for ever, and therefore Sunday School is quietly dropped together with Day School.[185]

Some leading chapel figures, however, particularly in Gornal where older working-class men could enjoy positions of influence in the Methodist chapels, were acculturised into sharing such expectations. Mr Hayes, one of several younger Gornal Methodists who went to Grammar School and then to university after the Second World War, recalled the way in which many older leading people in the chapel implicitly accepted the parallel between Day and Sunday school:

> It was just an accepted fact of life, you taught Sunday school from 3 ,4, 5 up to 14, 15 and that was it [...] The [old] apparatus for learning [...] was still there, letters of the alphabet on big frames, slates and stuff [...] although they didn't need to be taught to read, you know [...] but it was still as if this is school not church, we start at 5 and we leave at 14.[186]

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[182] e.g. Mrs Clark explained her lessened commitment to Lake Street Methodist chapel by reference to courting and explained her son's own lack of involvement at chapel as a young man in the same terms, although it would seem that National Service was the factor which provided the initial break for him (RPMSI, G8).

[183] WUI, G5. Similar explanations were provided by Mr Griffiths and Mr Beddoe (RPMSI, D10 and G4).

[184] e.g. RPMSI, D28.

[185] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, November 1936. St Thomas at this time had a 'Junior Church' with regular services for young people as an attempt to bridge the gap between Sunday school and church.

[186] RPMSI, G13.

Currie, Gilbert and Horsley argued that since the appeal of Sunday School was limited to children,[187] adults have increasingly tended to conclude that people should outgrow religion, with the result that Sunday Schools have institutionalised the notion that religion is for children and have worsened the problem that led to their initial creation in the eighteenth century: difficulty in attracting new members.[188] This is, however, a misunderstanding of popular religiosity. Regular involvement in the church was undoubtedly regarded by many as more important for children than for adults, but it is not safe to infer from such evidence that religion was considered a matter to be left behind with childhood. The religious teaching provided in Sunday schools was a vital part of the religious acculturisation of children and, for the majority, of subsequent religious beliefs and attitudes in mature adulthood.[189] Sunday school was consequently regarded as a vehicle for passing on to the next generation a highly valued part of one's own cultural and religious heritage. Regarding the church as an agent for cultural transmission, many people recognised no legitimate demand for any regular adult involvement and commitment in church.

Nevertheless, the extent to which, and ways in which, religious attitudes permeated aspects of life outside institutionalised channels of worship remained significant amongst regular and irregular churchgoers. In particular, the practices of private prayer, of singing hymns, keeping Sunday as a distinctive day and enjoying informal opportunities to participate in, or at least listen to, services of worship, remained a valued part of the lives of many who were rarely counted amongst Sunday worshippers at local churches. Many of these practices were extensions of Sunday school and parental teaching and, as chapter 4 will show, such teaching significantly shaped adult beliefs.

It is clear from the evidence of surveys that private prayer during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries extended well beyond the constituency of regular church-goers. Surveys

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[187] This was not strictly the case well into the twentieth century since, in the Gornal Methodist chapels for example, classes were held for adults in the form of Sunday afternoon Bible Classes and progression from the Senior Sunday School to the adult Bible Class was anticipated with excitement as a small rite of passage into adulthood (RPMSI, G21).

[188] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Church-Goers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 85-6.

[189] Chapter 4 gives further consideration to the influence of Sunday school on adult religious beliefs.

carried out during the twentieth century revealed private prayer to have been a habit of between 40% and 60%, most often a continuation of childhood practices, with greater frequency among women but no clear correlation with adult church-going habits. Such surveys also frequently commented on the tendency to resort to prayer in times of danger and distress.[190]

Local clergy were, typically, less optimistic about what happened outside the walls of the church. In 1939, John Ferley, Vicar of St Edmund's claimed that 'the practice of daily prayer at home has declined'.[191] It was certainly the case that joint family prayer was to be found in few local households during the inter-war years or later.[192] But in broader terms, Ferley's judgement was premature.[193] Prayer was far from absent in many homes throughout much of the period. Encouraged through Sunday school and day school, the practice was reinforced in many homes by parental teaching, whether parents were regular attenders at church or not.[194] Unlike many practices relating to childhood religion, fathers seem to have been just as frequently involved in the enforcement of private prayer, perhaps owing to the fact that it was a practice usually observed at bed-time, when many fathers, returned from work, could spend a few moments with their children. Mr Grainger's father, a road construction worker and brewer and an occasional attender at St James's Lower Gornal, was strict in his enforcement of bed-time prayers: 'father - he knelt by his bed every night and taught me to do the same'.[195] Mrs Hill, whose father was an engine-winder in Gornal and only rarely attended chapel, was just as insistent on his daughter's bed-time prayers as her mother who attended chapel quite

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[190] D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1919), pp. 166-68; Mass-Observation, *Puzzled People: a study of popular attitudes to religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London borough* (1947), pp. 53-7; Gallup (ed.), *Gallup International Public Opinion Polls*, p. 218; Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955), pp. 244-49; Nicholas Abercrombie, John Baker, Sebastian Brett and Jane Foster, 'Superstition and Religion: the God of the Gaps', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 3 (1970) edited by David Martin and Michael Hill, pp. 93-129 (p. 115).

[191] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, June 1939.

[192] Despite the sample's over-representation of committed churchgoing families, family prayer was a feature of households of just 23 of the 133 questionnaire respondents, and was mentioned by only 2 interviewees (RPMSI, G5 an G13). Of the 32 questionnaire respondents with neither parent a regular attender, only 2 engaged in family prayer during the respondents' childhoods.

[193] Chapter 7 will argue that prayer, particularly teaching one's children to pray, was amongst the practices and beliefs which suffered some decline during the post-War years.

[194] Cf. Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 256-57; Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, p. 244.

[195] RPMSI, D12.

frequently. A sickly child with poor legs, Mrs Hill was reminded by her father to count her blessings:

> He'd say, he'd know a little girl that hadn't got any legs at all, so you'd got to be thankful and pray about it and thank God for it, you know. It learnt me that there is always somebody worse off than yourself.[196]

Mr Hammond's father, who attended Bert Bissell's Bible Class at Vicar Street Methodist but did not attend regular Sunday services, was also the enforcer of bed-time prayers:

> Dad was always at the side of the bed at night when we went to bed, to say our prayers. That was his finishing job for the day. He was always there to say his prayers and we'd say prayers with him.[197]

Others, children of both regular and irregular church-attending parents, recalled their mothers as the evening presence at the bedside, insisting on prayer.[198] In a few cases, the duty was shared between parents.[199]

Childhood prayers in regular and irregular church-going families generally consisted of invoking a blessing on, or praying for the health of, family members, praying to be seen safely through the night and reciting simple verses such as 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild' or the Lord's Prayer.[200] Such practices have, for some, remained a part of adult life, undergoing relatively little change. Mr Bedford, though never attending church as an adult living on the Wren's Nest Estate, has maintained a lifetime's practice of private prayer, sitting on his bed before getting in it and praying for a good night's sleep, to wake up in the morning, and for protection through night and day.[201] Mrs Clark, an occasional adult attender at Lake Street Methodist chapel, has maintained a lifetime's habit of daily prayer:

> Every night. I still say them now [...] Well me mother taught me one. There are 6 angels round my bed, 2 to watch, 2 to pray and 2 to take my sins away. And the Lord's Prayer.[202]

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[196] RPMSI, D14.
[197] RPMSI, D16. Some regularly attending fathers were also the enforcers of bed-time prayers (e.g. those of Miss Hopkins (RPMSI, G14) and Mr Hughes (RPMSI, G18).
[198] e.g. RPMSI, G7, G13, D22, G2 (Mr Sankey and Mrs Brooks), G16, D27 and G4.
[199] RPMSI, D4 (Mr and Mrs Carter) and G10 (Mr Fletcher).
[200] e.g. RPMSI, G10 (Mr Fletcher), G22 and G13
[201] RPMSI, D3. Cf. also RPMSI, G20.
[202] RPMSI, G8.

For some, prayer remained a bed-time routine. Adult private prayer, however, was often invisible and stolen at moments, particularly for women, when private thought was possible during the busy daily domestic routine. Edward Bailey's research in Bristol, drawing on his observations as an Anglican minister during the early 1970s, led him to conclude that the practice of private prayer can be compared with the most intimate biological functions, for the 'simultaneous universality and discretion with which it is practised', frequently said by women while washing up and doing other household chores.[203] Mrs Tomlins, who attended Methodist Sunday school in Coseley but rarely attended any place of worship as an adult in Lower Gornal, stated simply, 'I've always done it on my own, without anybody knowing about it'.[204] Mrs Causer, an Anglican whose involvement in church has varied in regularity throughout her life, stole moments of prayer as a young mother in the 1960s:

> When Richard was young, and the other 2, [my prayer time] was mostly in the kitchen when I was doing the veg or washing up [...] And sometimes if I was lost in my world with the hoover, particularly when my husband was at work and I would be at the sink. And I had more time to stop and think [...] If you're just doing veg or washing up things go through your mind [...] I just hope that things will be alright the next day [...] It's comforting [...] You feel that you are saying something to someone. You can't see them. But to me you would feel that they were there. [205]

A brief visit to a church could also, however, provide the appropriate environment for prayer. In 1938, Reverend John Ferley of St Edmund's church observed four different groups of people (all irregular church attenders) entering the church one weekday evening, during the space of forty-five minutes. Such visits were, he claimed, typical, adding, 'the church is used a good deal by people who want to have quiet and the right atmosphere for their prayers'.[206] Mrs Richards, taught by her mother to say bed-time prayers, and an occasional attender at St Francis's as an adult, explained:

> I think when you walk inside a church and have said a little prayer and come out you feel refreshed [...] I feel as though I've been freed of something, I feel refreshed [...] Well, as

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[203] Edward Bailey, 'The Folk Religion of the English People', in Paul Badham (ed.), *Religion, State, and Society in Modern Britain* (Lampeter, 1989), pp.145-58 (p. 152).
[204] RPMSI, G29.
[205] RPMSI, D6.
[206] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, May 1938.

> you've said a little prayer and thought things in your head you wouldn't say to anybody, but you're in a calm atmosphere.[207]

Prayer was found particularly helpful in times of distress and danger,[208] and for many prayer was turned to only at such moments. Resort was made to childhood practices of, for example, praying for the health and happiness of loved ones.[209] Mrs Carter, a Wren's Nest Estate resident and infrequent churchgoer as an adult observed:

> We used to say to ourselves, We don't go to church, but when we go to bed we can pray, can't we? And if your mother was in hospital, you'd go to bed and ask the Lord to help her to get better.[210]

Similar comments about prayer were made by Mrs Young (and agreed to by her husband), also an infrequent churchgoer living on the Wren's Nest Estate:

> I think there's a God. I believe in God and if there's anything wrong you pray to him don't you? [...] I think it does help yes [...] in illness or anything like that.[211]

Mrs Sankey, brought up in an Anglican Sunday school in Stoke but an infrequent adult attender in Lower Gornal, has likewise turned to prayer throughout her life in response to the threats of ill-health, and her comments reveal the extent to which such habits were firmly rooted, even if not frequently exercised:

> If your Mum wasn't very well you'd pray to the Lord to keep your mum. Like I do now [...] I mean them things - even if you don't go to chapel every week - them things come to you naturally.[212]

Adult men, perhaps less inclined than women to regard the well-being of extended family as part of their responsibility, were more likely to shed the habit of private prayer, as they became less involved with church from their teenage years or early adulthood. Mr Grainger, Mr Lewis and Mr Beddoe all confirmed that as young adult men they had lost the practice of regular

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[207] RPMSI, D23. Cf. Mrs Palmer, for most of her life a regular attender at St Edmund's but now unable to attend due to infirmity, who still goes into the church to pray when visiting the market (RPMSI, D22).

[208] e.g. RPMSI, G8.

[209] Such concerns were more commonly the focus of prayer than spiritual welfare, although there were exceptions to this rule (committed evangelicals) who prayed for conversions amongst their families and friends (e.g. RPMSI, G13 and G18).

[210] RPMSI, D4.

[211] RPMSI, D30.

[212] RPMSI, G2. Cf. also RPMSI, D25 (Mr Smart).

private prayer as their connections with their local churches became tenuous and life was busy and relatively untroubled.[213] Nevertheless, confrontation with personal danger, particularly during active service in the Second World War, had the capacity to drive such men back to prayer.[214]

Prayer was thus generally petitionary, private and, in many cases, occasional rather than regular. Daily prayer was regarded by some as unduly pious. Mr Simpson of the Wren's Nest Estate, admitted to praying occasionally throughout his life at times of need, but regarded his neighbour's prayer habit of praying on his knees each night as 'going a bit too far'.[215] By contrast, those who underwent conversion experiences,[216] stressed the personal relationship formed with God and the role of prayer as a means of expressing and developing that relationship. Mrs Jones, one of several Gornal Methodists who emphasised the importance of conversionary re-birth, explained the purpose of prayer as she has understood it since her teenage conversion:

> prayer is like communion with God, isn't it? In a sense it's like a friendship [...] So you don't just go to God if you need something [...] You go to a friend at all times, if it's a real friend. Because you want to, you pray because you want to.[217]

Prayer also moved outside the realm of individual privacy in two contexts: grace, and calling upon, or welcoming, the prayers of representatives of the churches, particularly following deaths.

Grace was a regular practice for a very small, mainly churchgoing, minority.[218] In such families, it was said at the main meal of the day, sometimes only on Sundays, usually by the father though occasionally by another member of the family.[219] In households where parents were not regular churchgoers, grace was sometimes reserved for special occasions such as Christmas or the presence of visitors.[220]

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[213] RPMSI, D12, D21 and G4.
[214] RPMSI, D12 and G4.
[215] RPMSI, D24.
[216] Conversion experiences are discussed in chapter 6.
[217] RPMSI, G19.
[218] Of 133 respondents, 25 were brought up in households where grace was regularly said. In none of the 32 households where neither parent was a regular churchgoer was grace said regularly.
[219] e.g. RPMSI, G13, D17, G18 and G22.
[220] RPMSI, G26, D5 and G20.

The prayers of a minister, or representative of a church on the occasion of a death in the family, were recalled gratefully both by regular and irregular churchgoers.[221] Mr Hudson, a former Cliff College missioner and prominent member of St Paul's Protestant church in Lower Gornal after the War, was occasionally called upon for such purposes:

> I've been sent for at some unearthly hour. 'Our so-and-so is dying. Will you come and pray for him or her?' [...] Now why did they send for me? They invite you along and they shed tears and everything, but that's the end of it [i.e. they do not come to church].[222]

Prayer was not the only inheritance from Sunday school which found expression in adult life. Hymns also had a powerful nostalgic attraction over many people long after they had loosened their ties with institutional religion.[223] Oral evidence from Dudley and the Gornals confirms the salience of hymns in the evocation of memories of childhood, home and parents, Sunday school and Sunday School Anniversaries. Favourite hymns were almost always learnt from parents or at Sunday school, and reinforced through adult attendance at Sunday school anniversaries, often being referred to by interviewees as 'old-fashioned ones'.[224] Ministers who attempted to introduce new hymns to regular Sunday services could find themselves confronted by a less than enthusiastic response. John Ferley, Vicar of St Edmund's from 1937, for example, introduced a number of innovations to Sunday services but none provoked more hostility than the regular inclusion of unfamiliar hymns.[225] He vented his frustration in the parish magazine:

> It is unfortunately too true that people will sing what might be called rococo or sentimental hymns, mainly because the tunes are always in accord with the words. Such hymns create an atmosphere but nothing else.[226]

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[221] RPMSI, G26, D30 and D4.

[222] RPMSI, G17.

[223] Cf. Cairns, *Army and Religion*, p. 198; Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 268-69.

[224] e.g. RPMSI, D23, G3. Hymns named by more than one interviewee included 'The Old Rugged Cross' (RPMSI, D23, G28 and G2 (Mr and Mrs Sankey)), 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus' (RPMSI, G7, G15 (Mrs Hood) and G22), 'Abide with Me' (RPMSI, G28 and G25) and 'When I survey the wondrous Cross' (RPMSI, G26 and G15 (Mrs Hood)). Several Gornal interviewees referred in general to Sankey hymns and to those published in a booklet following the local Penfold mission in 1920.

[225] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, November 1938.

[226] *St Edmund's Parish Magazine*, April 1939.

Commonly adult responses to hymns were indeed sentimental. The memory of parents was triggered by the recollection of the comforting sound of the regular hymn-singing accompaniment to house-work.[227] For Mr Lewis the recollection of his Methodist parents singing in the house remains evocative and associated with the hymn, 'In Loving Kindness':

> On a Sunday, I'd be in the back with me brother, and dad got up early [...] and the sweetest thing I used to hear on Sunday morning [...] dad used to be peeling potatoes and he always used to sing that hymn. That was beautiful, to me, that. And then me mom used to join in with him.[228]

The power of hymns to produce a marked emotional response seems to have been felt particularly acutely by men who did not regularly attend chapel but whose wives and/or daughters did. Mrs Clark recalled of her father that although he never went to chapel with her and her mother, he always used to sing all the old hymns.[229] Mrs Wesley, born in 1921, attended Five Ways chapel regularly as a Sunday Scholar and later became an adult member at the chapel. Her father, a miner at Baggeridge colliery, rarely attended chapel, but responded emotionally to hymn-singing:

> He was a very good man, but no leanings to church in that way [attendance]. But I always used to sing and I had a good voice and he could not sit and listen to me singing without crying.[230]

Mrs Brooks and Mr Sankey both attended Zoar Sunday School as children but only occasionally attended as adults. Their father, another Baggeridge miner, rarely attended chapel but responded in a similar way to hymns sung during services broadcast on the radio:

> When the church service used to come on of a night-time, your dad used to fill completely up, ready to cry.[231]

Such responses may be indicative of a nostalgic yearning for the remembered happiness of childhood. Hymns had the power to evoke vivid memories, even visions, of lost family members. Mrs Childs' father, a foundry worker, stopped attending chapel, whilst his children

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[227] RPMSI, D21.
[228] RPMSI, D21. Cf. Mrs Brooks, who recalled her mother singing hymns whilst sewing (RPMSI, G2).
[229] RPMSI, G8.
[230] RPMSI, G30.
[231] RPMSI, G2 (Mrs Sankey).

were still young. Her older sister, Annie, died in her teens, but when Mrs Childs sang a solo at the Sunday School Anniversary service on her last appearance on the platform at the age of 16, her father was 'fixed by a vision of our Annie' (as he later told Mrs Childs).[232]

The words of some hymns encouraged a sentimental and familial religiosity. Popular in Gornal, following the Penfold Mission of 1920, was a book of hymns and songs of worship produced for the mission, which remained in circulation for many years afterwards. Some of the songs were sung by guest soloists in special services in the Methodist chapels during the inter-war years. Mrs Mason, born in 1915 and a lifelong attender at Five Ways chapel, recalled one such song:

> I remember one coming and you'd cry at it. It said [she sings], In a lonely graveyard many miles away, lies a dear old mother,'neath the cold cold clay. [her voice cracks with emotion] You see what I mean, it was like a story and it as much as said she'd been praying for this man all his life and he was telling her although her was dead that he should see her when he died [laughs] I always remember that one.[233]

The words of such songs - and favourite hymns in general - provided an expression of the popular religiosity centred around the family which vitally underpinned the common experience of encounters with family spirits.[234]

But hymns were not confined solely to the church and the home. Through the weekly services of the Salvation Army and its band in the Market Place of Dudley, they had a regular presence in a more public arena and here too the recollection of hymns and their music creates a poignant evocation of a past better way of life. Mr Young's recollection of his enjoyment of the Salvation Army band playing in the Market Place moved straight into a comment on the generally happier and safer days during which such events took place:

> In old Dudley, when the Salvation Army were there it was beautiful. I've spent some happy hours up there in the town. At one time, I could come out of the shop and walk across to the bank with a bag of money on my shoulder unchallenged even though the town was packed.[235]

Recollections of the outdoor services of the Salvation Army and of hymns learnt at such services during childhood could, for some, contribute significantly to the decision to return to

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[232] RPMSI, G7.
[233] RPMSI, G22. Cf. RPMSI, G2 (Mrs Brooks).
[234] These are discussed in chapter 6.
[235] RPMSI, D30 (Mr Young).

active involvement in church life much later in life. Mrs Homer, a Salvationist with the Sedgley and Gornal branch from the time she moved from Wales into Sedgley in 1938, commented on the arrival of two new regular attenders just before Christmas 1996:

> [It's] because they remember the days when we used to sit them on the banks up Beacon Lane, and we used to play the tambourine and have these children singing. They come now and they're regular comers, two ladies. They remember us teaching them to sing the choruses.[236]

The singing of popular hymns extended beyond the confines of church, chapel, open-air service and even beyond the domestic sphere. Clubs and pubs were frequently the site for the relaxed enjoyment and expression of religious sentiment. Sometimes religious festivals were celebrated with varying degrees of formality at such venues. At Christmas, for example, pubs regularly became venues for the singing or enjoyment of Christian music. Mr Sankey recalled:

> The Zoar had a brass band, and every Christmas they come round and it was really beautiful. And I mean like before Christmas, they'd go to the pubs and carols and that and it would be really grand.[237]

At some pubs, however, the singing of hymns was a weekly activity, prompted by the visit of a local Salvation Army *War Cry* seller. A young woman called Grace was reputedly very popular in Gornal,[238] and Mr Sankey, whose family lived next door to the Pear Tree Inn, recalled her visits to the pub during his childhood:

> the Salvation come to there and there was one woman there that could really sing and they'd always got the *War Cry* coming round. And they always looked [in] at the Pear Tree. She loved to come to the Pear Tree and the Pear Tree used to love this woman from the Salvation Army. And it was every Friday night and we used to stand outside listening to them singing. And it was 'Onward Christian Soldiers' [...] And half of them, they were miners, and they were rough and ready people, there's no doubt about it. But they'd always have a *War Cry* and they always came out of the pub with a *War Cry*.
>
> Q. Often people who wouldn't go to chapel?
>
> Yes, there were quite a few people in the pub who wouldn't go to chapel [...] That was their way of seeking salvation [laughs].[239]

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[236] RPMSI, G16.
[237] RPMSI, G2 (Mr Sankey).
[238] RPMSI, G16.
[239] RPMSI, G2. Richard Hoggart notes the working-class belief that the Salvation Army 'do a lot of good' and that the *War Cry* sells in pubs (*The Uses of Literacy*, p. 116).

Informal *ad hoc* singing of hymns was also popular at clubs. The husband of Salvationist Mrs Homer, brought up a Baptist, but not practising by the time he moved to Sedgley and married, was a stalwart of a local men's club. Mrs Homer recalled of the years just after the War:

> When he come home he would say I've done more good than you. I've had them all down there, singing hymns [...] And since he's died I've heard a lot especially from the man that comes to do the garden. He says 'Do you know, they used to queue up when there was trips, but if they said that George Homer was going in the other coach, they'd all flock over there to queue up to be where George was because they could guarantee on having a good old song.' He would never ever sing comic songs. It was hymns.[240]

Hymns were also sung in the workplace, particularly by women working alongside one another in tailoring factories during the interwar years and early post-war years, when they remained a major part of a shared repertoire of known songs. Mrs Mason, who worked at Grainger and Smith's in Dudley, recalled singing hymns with other girls whilst they worked at the machines in the early 1930s. Mrs Griffiths, who worked at another Dudley tailoring factory from 1945 to 1948, had similar recollections:

> And we used to have a good old sing-song at work, at Buxton Baileys tailoring factory. There was a lady that used to sit next to me [...] We would goad her to start us off. And she would start and then we all used to sing to drown the noise. Sometimes it used to be hymns and sometimes it was some song that was popular at the time. But a lot of the time it used to be mostly hymns because everybody seemed to know more hymns.[241]

Joining in with hymns in the services broadcast on the wireless was also common. Indeed, such broadcasts were, for considerable numbers across the country, an essential part of the Sunday routine, providing a vehicle for worship for many who did not attend church.[242] Locally, many households of both regular and irregular churchgoers regularly tuned into the broadcasts of religious services on Sundays, a practice which interviewees, many now elderly, have continued to enjoy with the infirmity of old age making church attendance difficult.[243] In

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[240] RPMSI, G16.

[241] RPMSI, D10.

[242] In 1938, 25% of a Gallup poll sample admitted that they sometimes stayed away from church or chapel because they could listen to services on the radio, whilst in 1957 61% of a sample poll claimed to listen to, or watch, broadcast religious services with nearly half of these claiming to do so regularly (Gallup (ed.), *op cit.*, pp. 403-07). For similar findings from surveys in 1947 and 1968, see M-O A: FR3049, POLL III, 'Has the Church of England Had Its Day?'; and Michael Svennevig, Ian Haldane, Sharon Spiers and Barrie Gunter, *Godwatching: Viewers, Religion and Televion* (1988), p. 7.

[243] e.g. RPMSI, D1, D3, D17, D24, D25, D28, G3, G5, G7, G8, G12, G25, G28.

some households, this was more a matter of accident than design, since the radio, or later the television, would be on much of the time.[244] In others, like those of the Gornal Methodist families of Mr Hayes and Mr Hughes, listening to the Sunday evening radio service was a ritual after church or chapel attendance earlier in the day.[245] Some, however, explicitly made the point that such services provided a compensation for failure to attend church, as local church and chapel organisations occasionally observed with dismay.[246] Mr Grainger, who moved to Dudley as a young man when his wife was ill and found it difficult to attend services at St James's Lower Gornal, hitherto his regular church, deliberately tuned into radio and then television services:

> Oh yes, that would be on. As I say we were too far away [from St James's...] Well, it was all we could do then. That had to suffice. It helped keep me faith, kept me in touch [...] you'd feel, that you was part of them.[247]

Mr Thomas's parents, who stopped attending St Thomas's during the War after being disgusted by the perceived snobbery of one of the wardens, thereafter relied on religious broadcasts:

> Although mother and father stopped going to church there was one thing that you would always find in our home. At 10 o'clock in the morning on would go the wireless for morning worship. At night time, the one thing that they always insisted on was having the evening service from 8.30pm to 9pm.[248]

For others, never regular attenders, it was less a second best, more an integral part of Sunday.[249] For Mrs Carter's family, infrequent church attenders, listening to the religious service on the radio was 'that special time' each Sunday.[250] Weekday morning religious broadcasts also provided housewives with a break from domestic chores. Mrs Hill's mother, for

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[244] e.g. RPMSI, D8 (Mr and Mrs Downing); RPMSI, D19, D23, D30 and G1.

[245] RPMSI, G13, G18.

[246] e.g. Dudley Methodist Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 8 March 1941 ('things were made very easy for the people these days, the wireless bringing the church service to the fireside', Reverend Price stated).

[247] RPMSI, D12. Cf. Mr Lewis's mother, who stopped attending church when Mr Lewis's father died in 1947, but regularly listened to radio services which, Mr Lewis believes, she found 'uplifting' (RPMSI, D21).

[248] RPMSI, D27.

[249] e.g. RPMSI, G2 (Mr and Mrs Sankey and Mrs Brooks).

[250] RPMSI, D4. Cf. the mothers of Mrs Cash, Mrs Causer and Mr Beddoe (RPMSI, D5, D6 and G4) and the parents of Mrs Kenny (RPMSI, G20).

example, an occasional Methodist, used not only to listen to services on Sundays but also to weekday services:

> There used to be one on at 10.15 every morning and she'd always, whatever she was doing, she'd sit down and listen to that.[251]

Like many others, Mrs Hill's mother took particular pleasure in singing along to the hymns.[252] Mrs Jeavons recalled the routine she adhered to with her mother, who only attended special services at St Francis's church: 'we would get the hymn and Bible books out and sing along with it'.[253]

Mr Latham, whose father owned a small hardware store in Lower Gornal and charged the accumulators for wirelesses owned by local residents, recalled that many local people insisted that their radios should be working on a Sunday in order that they could listen to the Sunday service. His own parents, lapsed Methodists, joined Mr Latham's grandmother each Sunday, the evening always including a strict observance of the radio service:

> On a Sunday evening mother and dad would gravitate to grandmother's [...] And grandmother was very old but a stickler and she would always have - I think it was something from St Martin's in the Field [...] and every Sunday night they had to stop the conversation and they had to pay attention to the service on the radio [...] and they would all respect and sit round and listen.[254]

Radio services were not the only feature which distinguished Sunday from other days of the week. Historians have identified the observance of Sunday as one feature of a diffusive or pervasive Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[255] This century, however, has been regarded as the period during which Sunday observance was whittled away by social and cultural trends - secularity and materialism and the effects of the two world wars - and, from the 1930s, by legislation.[256]

Local clergy were outspoken in their defence of the Sabbath against the encroachments of secular activities and the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council throughout its history

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[251] RPMSI, D14.
[252] Cf. Mr Hammond's parents (RPMSI, D16); RPMSI, D22.
[253] RPMSI, D20.
[254] RPMSI, G21.
[255] e.g. Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 258-61; Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 100-03.
[256] John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 192-98.

took it upon itself to protect the integrity of the Sabbath.[257] The opening of parks, Sunday trading and Sunday entertainments, including Dudley Zoo from 1937, all drew the wrath of local clergy and regular churchgoers.[258] For some, of course, Sunday was emphatically a day of church and chapel attendance,[259] and non-attenders, morally upright though they may be, were considered to be failing to observe the Sabbath.[260]

The enforcement of Sabbath observance by its stricter advocates could be strict to the point of cruelty. Mr Davis was spurned by his Strict Baptist relatives for working on the construction of his house in Lower Gornal on Sundays immediately after the War, after receiving a strongly worded written reprimand, justified by reference to Ezekiel 3, vv. 17-19.[261] Mrs Williams, a Sedgley councillor during the 1950s, and a fierce opponent of the local Free Church Council's opposition to the opening of local parks, recalled an incident from her childhood:

> When I was a small child my father bought me a bicycle. I was standing outside my home on a Sunday when a man came along and said to me, 'If you get on that bicycle you will go to hell'. I said to him, fairly politely, 'I shall not go to hell - I shall go to Sedgley Beacon'. I had a vicious smack across the mouth.[262]

It might seem, therefore, that there were two sharply opposed camps: religious church-going Sabbath-observers and irreligious non church-going Sabbath-breakers. This would, however, be a misrepresentation of popular attitudes to Sunday throughout the inter-war years and, to a lesser extent, into the post-war years.[263]

Sunday was still regarded as a distinctive day, and frequently demanded codes of behaviour different from those of other days of the week in the households of infrequent as well as frequent church attenders. A Mass-Observation survey of 200 interviewees in 1942 revealed

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[257] See, for example, *DH*, 25 April 1931; G&SFCC Minutes, *passim*.

[258] e.g. V.C. Powell, vicar of St Francis, in 1937 (*DH*, 4 August 1937).

[259] For some, as Mrs Perry recalled, the busy schedule of church or chapel activities made Sunday anything but a day of rest (RPMSI, G23). Cf. RPMSI, G10.

[260] For example, a Methodist local preacher commented to the local preachers meeting in 1935: 'We all know so many people who are really good at heart and good living, but who seem to ignore the church and the sanctity of the Sabbath' (Dudley Methodist Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, September 1935).

[261] RPMSI, G9.

[262] *DH*, 30 July 1955.

[263] The nature of, and possible reasons for, the decline in Sunday observance from World War II onwards are explored in chapter 7.

a popular belief that the traditional Sunday was a peculiarly English institution. The constituent parts were, in many respects, not overtly religious: late rising, a larger breakfast, wearing best clothes, a large dinner, rest or sleep in the afternoon, a walk, visiting friends and relatives, and a large tea. In general, Sunday was expected to move to a slower tempo than other days of the week. The report concluded:

> The importance of religion in peoples [*sic*] actual Sunday routine now is slight, but the importance of religion in peoples attitude to the traditional Sunday is much more considerable. The religious *associations* of Sunday, as opposed to the religious *observances*, play an important part in peoples [*sic*] feelings about Sunday now.[264]

All of the features of Sunday identified by Mass-Observation were characteristic of many Dudley and Gornal households throughout much of the period, combining to make what was felt by many to be a family day but also, in a more overtly Christian sense, a day of rest.[265] Sunday best clothes, however, were particularly vividly recalled, often before anything else, as a defining mark of Sunday, whether for attendance at church or not, and children's Sunday behaviour was regulated partly by fear of dirtying their Sunday best.[266] It was not only children, however, who wore best clothes on Sunday. Adults also adopted a change from the rest of the week even if they were not attending church. In households where money was short - as was the case in many during the interwar years - the distinction could be minimal but important, as Mrs Griffiths recalled of her grandfather:

> Grandfather used to wear corduroy breaches which fastened up at the side with laces and over the top he wore boots and leggings and fastened them with three buckles. During the week he'd wear black breeches and black shoes and leggings, and on a Sunday it was brown. That was the only change he ever made.[267]

In addition, however, more orthodox Sabbatarian attitudes continued to inform the observance of Sunday in many households of infrequent attenders in ways similar to those of regular attenders. Playing, particularly outside in the streets, was commonly forbidden. Mr

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[264] M-O A: FR 1268, 'The Traditional English Sunday', 20 May 1942.

[265] e.g. RPMSI, D1, D3, D5, D7, D14, D16, D20, D21, D24, D25, D26, G1, G2 (Mrs Sankey), G3, G4, G12, G20, G26.

[266] e.g. RPMSI, D28, G28.

[267] RPMSI, D10. Such was the importance of Sunday clothes in spite of poverty, that some families during the late 1920s and 1930s, reportedly pawned their Sunday best clothes each Monday and picked them up on Saturday (RPMSI, G7).

Hayes, whose parents were members and regular attenders at Kent Street Methodist chapel in Upper Gornal, recalled Sunday as totally different from the rest of the week. Apart from chapel attendance, Sunday involved appropriate behaviour both inside and outside: 'You wore Sunday clothes, and there was no games outside and that was it [...You could] read a book, puzzles, jigsaws'.[268] The same attitudes characterised the childhood homes of Mrs Tudor, daughter of occasional Dudley Anglicans:

> Oh no, we weren't allowed to play or be noisy on Sundays like we were in the week. [269]

For Miss Hopkins, daughter of occasional Ruiton Congregationalists, as a child Christian living involved 'a lot of dos and don'ts':

> Like not doing certain things on a Sunday. We wouldn't be allowed to go to the shops, spend money, or play in the street.[270]

Some combined the insistence on a peaceful day with a visit to the pub. Mrs Griffiths, who lived with her non-church-going grandparents in Stafford Street, Dudley recalled childhood Sundays:

> You couldn't go out playing, to play ball or skip. You couldn't do anything [...] The Sabbath Day, oh yes. It didn't stop them going to the pub. In fact when I think about it there never used to be anybody about on Sunday. The streets used to be deserted.[271]

Similarly, Mr Carter, whose parents were occasional Anglicans, and who has rarely attended church as an adult living on the Wren's Nest Estate, recalled that although his parents would go for a drink at the pub on Sundays,

> No matter what, my father and mother and her father and mother always said it is a day of rest, the Sabbath day. They kept it up and they learnt we to do the same thing.[272]

Some indoor activities were also banned. Card-playing was anathema in many households on Sunday, associated as it was with gambling, though allowed on any other day of the week.[273] Folk tales reinforced the importance of such observance, even in homes of infrequent church

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[268] RPMSI, G13.
[269] RPMSI, D28.Cf. RPMSI, D7, G15 (Mr Hood), G22.
[270] RPMSI, G14. The evidence suggests, however, that when open fields and woodland were available for children to play without disturbing others, as on the edges of Gornal and on the new Priory and Wren's Nest estates, the enforcement of this rule by some non-church-going parents was less strict even before the Second World War (e.g. RPMSI, G28, D30).
[271] RPMSI, D10. Cf. RPMSI, D12, G26, G2 (Mr Sankey and Mrs Brooks).
[272] RPMSI, D4. Cf. RPMSI, D23.
[273] e.g. RPMSI, D16.

attenders. In one tale, related to Mrs Carter as a child by her mother, a group of Dudley men who played cards and gambled on Sunday evenings were freed from the habit by the visitation of the devil.[274] Although Sunday observance declined in the post-war years,[275] such attitudes continued to influence contemporary habits. Mr Tranter, an occasional attender at Upper Gornal Methodist chapels as an adult, reflected that whilst Sunday is now little different at home from any other day,

> we do still class it as a restful day. There are things that I do - gambling for instance - I wouldn't gamble on a Sunday. I'm not *too* religious but it's still one of them things that I hold on to, that Sundays I wouldn't do it. [276]

Music in the home was often restricted to hymns on Sundays, and not only in regular church- and chapel-going homes. Mr Lewis's mother, a Lower Gornal lapsed Methodist, insisted that her son, a capable pianist, play only hymns on Sundays:

> On Sundays [...] I had to play Home, Sweet Home and Abide with Me with variations and things like that and hymn tunes and she told me to play the old Alexandra hymns and Penfold hymns.[277]

Sunday prohibitions were imposed not only on children but were also self-imposed by adults. Whilst leisure and other relaxing activities were usually acceptable, anything which resembled work was often proscribed. For women, this meant avoiding doing washing on Sundays, a practice observed in both church-going and non-church-going homes.[278] Mrs Hill's mother, for example, a Methodist who lived on the Priory Estate, was adamant on such matters:

> The only housework my mother ever did on a Sunday was wash up and cook the Sunday dinner [...] And if you'd mentioned washing to my mother on a Sunday she'd have gone absolutely stark raving mad [...] no, not on a Sunday.[279]

For men, it often meant finding the appropriate attitude to working in the garden. Mr Carter, who refused to do Sunday shifts at a local foundry as a young man though never

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[274] RPMSI, D4.
[275] As chapter 7 will argue.
[276] RPMSI, G28.
[277] RPMSI, G21. Cf. the more regular Baptist chapel-going household of Mrs Perry (RPMSI, G23).
[278] e.g. RPMSI, G16, D4 (Mr Carter's parents), G26, G16.
[279] RPMSI, D14. Cf. RPMSI, D11 (Mrs Griffin's mother). The Sunday prohibition on cutting nails, an apparently inconsequential activity, seems to have been rooted in the folk beliefs discussed in chapter 4, though according to Mr Beddoe it was in his household a Sabbath issue: 'There was no cutting nails on Sunday, that was taboo on Sunday [...] Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest. There were 6 days in the week, if you could not cut your nails 6 days in a week you weren't going to cut them on Sunday [...] the Sabbath was the Sabbath' (RPMSI, G4).

attending church, enjoyed a Sunday drink at a local club with his father but has always extended the concept of the day of rest into his own Sunday pursuits:

> Sunday, did no work, used to call it a day of rest, dain't do no work. Well I mess in the garden every day of the week, but that's the only day as I don't mess in the garden, I go and have a walk round it but I don't touch nothing, I call that a Sabbath day.[280]

Mr Raybould, a fairly regular attender at Lake Street Methodist chapel, also enjoyed a regular Sunday visit to the pub, but similarly avoided working in the garden: 'I never went in there. If I'd got to pick some beans I'd pick them on Saturday night, not Sunday [...] wouldn't go in the garden, that was work'.[281]

The resolution of the dilemma was not always to avoid working in the garden. Mr Hope, a bus driver who had to work on Sundays, explained that he followed his father's attitude to working in the garden:

> That was one thing as I never believed in, because my father was the same: he did the garden on a Sunday, but he was doing it for the good Lord, he wasn't a religious man by any means, quite the reverse, but [...] he always regarded Sunday as Sunday.[282]

Attendance at pubs and clubs, considered leisurely and hence acceptable Sunday behaviour by many working-class men, was not considered so by some who were not frequent church attenders. Mrs Wesley's father, a miner and a keen member of the Gornal Labour Club, refused to attend clubs on Sundays:

> Me dad would never go to the Labour Club or the Miners' Welfare because they met on a Sunday [...] Even though he didn't go to church he'd got his principles and he kept to them.[283]

The fiercest Sabbatarian debates arose from proposals to open cinemas on Sundays from the late 1930s. In 1932 the government passed the Sunday Entertainments Act, following a series of prosecutions of cinemas opening on Sundays under an eighteenth-century act. The new act allowed cinemas to open on Sundays, subject to local option.[284] The debate arose earliest in Dudley in 1938 and generated a flood of letters in the local press from the local

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[280] RPMSI, D4.
[281] RPMSI, G25.
[282] RPMSI, D19.
[283] RPMSI, G30.
[284] Wigley, *Rise and Fall*, p. 193

Cinema Association and its supporters and from its Sabbatarian opponents.[285] The Cinema Association claimed to have conducted an informal local poll, finding in its favour by nearly 9000 to nearly 2000, and the initial town hall meeting where the cinema lobby was defeated 630 to 158 was dismissed by the editor of the local newspaper as an unrepresentative gathering, with support drummed up by local religious organisations.[286] The meeting, however, forced a poll of the town's electors in April 1939. The result was a vote of 7035 to 2957 against the opening of cinemas on Sundays. The turnout for the poll was just 30%, but when total Easter communicants at the town's seven Anglican churches in the same month totalled approximately 1750[287] and membership of its eight Methodist chapels totalled 693, one must accept the assertion of the Archdeacon of Dudley that many of the opponents of Sunday opening were not active church people.[288]

The decision was to have little long-term significance in Dudley as the Second World War, which gave local military commanders the right to request the opening of cinemas, effectively paved the way for an acceptance of Sunday cinemas during the post-war era. Sedgley and Gornal, too far away from any military camp for opening to be effected under the Defence Regulations of the War, first confronted the issue during the 1950s. In 1958, the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council co-ordinated a concerted campaign against opening. The town hall meeting was once again packed by Free Church supporters and the result was a vote of 295 to 7 against Sunday cinema. The poll which followed produced a victory for the cinema opening lobby on a turnout of around 22% of the electorate, reflecting the changed attitudes of the post-war years,[289] but by a remarkably narrow margin of 46 (1898 to 1852).[290] There remained, it seems, considerable support for the belief that Sunday should remain special. Oral evidence confirms that many non-church-goers vehemently opposed the opening of cinemas on Sundays both in Dudley before the War and in Gornal after it.

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[285] e.g. *DH*, 4, 11, 18 and 25 March, 8, 15 and 22 April, 6 and 20 May.
[286] *DH*, 4 March and 8 April.
[287] There are no extant service registers for St Luke's for 1939, so 200 (10 more than the St Luke's average for 1921-31) has been added to total communicants for the other churches.
[288] *DH*, 22 April 1939.
[289] Further considered in chapter 7.
[290] G&SFCC Miuntes, various dates, 1958; Ned Williams, 'The Sunday Opening Wars in the Black Country', *The Blackcountryman*, 30 No. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 43-7.

Conclusion

The emphasis of this chapter has been on the commonality of religious practices across both the regular and the irregular church-going constituencies. Where the practices were, in some ways, invested with different meanings by some regular, particularly evangelical, churchgoers - as in the case of prayer, for example - the differences have been noted. But in terms of involvement in a variety of associational activities, the ritual dimension of religion constitutes a major division between the regular and irregular churchgoer, as the opening of the chapter acknowledged.

The local churches and chapels offered an extensive and changing variety of groups and activities in addition to the regular services of worship, some closely and obviously related to the central spiritual work of the churches, others less so. At St Thomas's, for example, between the 1920s and 1940s, adults could choose to join, or take part in, amongst other things a Women's Bible Class, bell-ringing, a Men's Club, Church of England Men's Society, billiards (in the 'Men's Friendly Hut'), Mothers' Union, Young Wives' Group, a social club, football and cricket matches and badminton, whilst children and youths were provided with a Young Men's Club, a youth club, football and cricket matches, guides and scouts and the Anglican Young People's Association.[291] Wesley Methodist chapel offered a similar array of activities: a weekly Women's Meeting, Fellowship, a Dramatic Society, a Social and Youth club, choir, a Band of Hope, football and cricket, amongst other things.[292] Such opportunities were replicated to a greater or lesser degree throughout the churches and chapels of Dudley and Gornal.

Some groups, such as the Mothers' Union in the Church of England, proved attractive to those who desired only occasional contact with the church and rarely attended Sunday services. The opportunity for occasional sociability could be a major attraction. Such occasional involvement sometimes paved the way for a more whole-hearted involvement in the

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[291] *St Thomas's Parish Magazine*, various editions from 1929-1965.

[292] *Wesley News Sheet* (January 1948 to September 1965); Minutes of Leaders' Meetings Wesley Church, 1911-1961.

local church. Mrs Causer, for example, became involved in St Thomas's Young Wives Group, then the Mothers' Union, in the early 1960s, after several years of non-involvement in associational religion, before gradually becoming involved in a regular capacity at St Francis's and getting confirmed.[293] For others, involvement in such organisations proved to be a means of sustaining a long-term occasional involvement. Mrs Jeavons's mother, for example, a resident of the Priory Estate from its early years in the 1930s, attended the monthly Mothers' Union meetings at St Francis's church for many years, since she believed that was what a 'church person' should do, although she never regularly attended Sunday services.[294]

Among many regular church and chapel-goers the weekly round of associational activities became a way of life, providing a routine and, particularly for women, a social circle which was highly valued. Mrs Childs, a lifelong Gornal Methodist, recalled the weekly routine as a young adult at Mount Zion chapel:

> Monday nights we went and discussed different passages of Scripture [with friends...] On a Tuesday night was choir practice [...] Wednesday afternoon was Women's meeting. Thursday night was practice night again. And if an Anniversary was coming [as a child] had to go Thursday and Friday.[295]

Such time-consuming involvement was not uncommon amongst those in Anglican and Nonconformist churches in Dudley and Gornal. If the man's social centre remained the pub, for many women the para-institutional groups attached to the churches and chapels provided a vital source of company and friendship. Whilst, as this chapter has argued, there was considerable common ground between regular and irregular attenders in terms of those activities which were identified as central to the Christian life, it cannot be denied that the weekly routines of the two groups - and the extent to which social needs were fulfilled by religious organisations - differed markedly.

If popular religious practices were largely, though loosely, defined by the norms of organised religion, this was less obviously true of popular religious beliefs which drew considerably, not only on the teachings of the churches but also, as the following chapters will argue, on a rich tradition of folk beliefs and superstitions.

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[293] RPMSI, D6.
[294] RPMSI, D20.
[295] RPMSI, G7.

Chapter 4

Popular Religious Beliefs 1: God, Christianity and the Supernatural in Everyday Life

Religious beliefs can be considered under three main headings: belief in the existence of a supernatural power and often in the intervention of that power in this world and in the life of the individual believer; belief in the existence of absolute and eternal moral and ethical values communicated through some medium from the supernatural to the human realm; and belief in an afterlife. The second and third of these three dimensions of religious belief are inextricably linked. The way in which one lived one's life on this earth was believed to pave the way for one's experience of the afterlife. The nature of beliefs in the afterlife must therefore be considered alongside the evidence of the translation of such beliefs into behaviour. These matters are explored therefore in chapter 5, combining a significant aspect of what Glock and Stark termed the 'ideological' with what they termed the 'consequential' dimensions of religion. It is the primary purpose of this chapter, therefore, to consider popular beliefs in the existence of, and worldly intervention of, a supernatural power.

Beliefs in a divine order and in its intervention in the world will be considered in terms of two categories: first those relating to the evidence for the existence of a divine power - both in terms of a popular 'first cause' hypothesis and in terms of the specific historical evidence of divine intervention presented in the Gospels; and second, and more extensively, in terms of the evidence of the workings of the supernatural realm in contemporary everyday life. The chapter will thus consider the ways in which religious beliefs were sustained by a combination of the authority of written (primarily Biblical) and oral traditions on the one hand, and personal observation and experience on the other.

Beliefs in God, the Bible, Jesus and the Cross

Research carried out at various points since World War I suggests that belief in a supernatural power has remained characteristic of a majority of the population of Britain throughout the twentieth century. In his study of soldiers on the Western Front during the First World War, Cairns found widespread belief in God and concluded that the effects of materialistic and anti-

religious propaganda some years earlier among the labouring classes had waned.[1] Similarly, Mass-Observation researchers found in the 1940s that two out of every three men and four out of every five women believed in God, whilst only one in twenty was firmly atheist.[2] And in 1963 a Gallup poll revealed belief in a God ('a personal or spiritual force') at seventy-one per cent, including over fifty per cent of those who did not classify themselves as being of any religion.[3] Towards the end of the century, around three quarters of the population retained a belief in some sort of God: seventy-six per cent in 1981 and seventy-one per cent in 1990.[4]

Only a handful of interviewees from Dudley and Gornal expressed outright disbelief in God or even a high degree of scepticism, and the oral evidence indicates that between 1914 and 1965 popular religious beliefs in the locality, amongst both regular and infrequent church attenders, were profoundly influenced by - although not by any means exclusively determined by - the teachings of the Bible and the Christian churches.

The basis of a popular theism lay in the evidence of life itself, and particularly of the natural world. Belief in God drew significantly throughout the period on a popular form of the argument from design.[5] Darwinism and cosmology had failed to provide a popularly satisfactory explanation of life, and God was still invoked by many interviewees both as the necessary explanation for life itself and as the only means of explaining the marvel of the natural world. Mrs Downing, a fairly frequent attender at St James's Eve Hill as a young adult, insisted:

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[1] D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1919), p. 7. For atheism, secularism and rationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Socialist Movement* (Manchester, 1974); Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850-1960* (1977); S. Budd, 'The Loss of Faith: Reasons for Unbelief among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850-1950', *Past &Present*, 36 (April 1967), pp. 106-25.

[2] Mass-Observation, *Puzzled People: a study of popular attitudes to religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London borough* (1947), p. 21.

[3] Bernice Martin, 'Comments on some Gallup Poll Statistics', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 1 (1968), pp.146-97 (p. 152).

[4] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford, 1994), Table 5.1, p. 78.

[5] In a survey of over 1000 British adults in 1968, 80% of respondents believed that God created the universe (Michael Svennevig, Ian Haldane, Sharon Spiers and Barrie Gunter, *Godwatching: Viewers, Religion and Televion* (1988), p. 46).

> To me, I believe in the Creation story - there are so many wonderful things, something must have made them. Oh, it's wonderful.[6]

Mr Raybould who, until the death of his wife in 1982, attended Lake Street chapel at least monthly, was equally emphatic:

> I believe there's a good Lord, I'll be honest about it. Many times I sit here and I look out there and I think, well they say there's not a God, but they can't make clouds, none of them can't [...] And they can't make lightning and thunder, I do know. So if there ain't no God up there, who the hell is it, because scientists can't do it on earth.[7]

Creationism was not, however, confined to regular churchgoers. Mrs Scott, an occasional attender as an adult at St James's, Lower Gornal, had often pondered 'how did it start?' and had always concluded 'it must be God's work'.[8] Mr Bedford, a Wren's Nest Estate resident who rarely attended church as an adult rejected the idea of evolution, stating simply, 'God, I think He made the world, ain't he? [...] it's got to be God's doings, ain't it?'[9]

If the search for an explanation for life underpinned a popular theism, the authority of the Bible invested popular religious beliefs with a more overtly Christian tone. The Bible remained important for many regular and irregular church attenders. In this respect, local attitudes in Dudley and Gornal during the fifty years from 1914 to 1965 apparently reflected national attitudes which prevailed throughout, and long after, the end of the period.[10] The Bible was important both as the vehicle for communicating significant aspects of the Christian story which were incorporated within popular religion and as a quasi-talismanic object in its own right, invested with both emotional and spiritual significance.

As a local Anglican minister stated in 1956, 'Most people, whether they attend church or not, reverence the Bible'.[11] Its physical presence in the family home seems to have been symbolic of a sense of security and continuity for many families. Mr Latham, whose parents had regularly attended Himley Road Wesleyan chapel until involved in a dispute with other

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6 RPMSI, D8.

7 RPMSI, G25. A similar explanation was given by Mrs Cash (RPMSI, D5).

8 RPMSI, G26.

9 RPMSI, D3.

10 For high levels of ownership, reading of, and reverence for the Bible throughout the twentieth century, see M-O A: FR 1994, 'Interim Report on Religious Instruction in Schools', 5 January 1944; M-O A: FR 3027, no title, August 1948, p. 1; Jan Harrison, *Attitudes to Bible, God, Church* (1983), pp. 8, 17-18 and 26.

11 *Parish Magazine of St Luke*, June 1956.

members of the church, recalled that the family Bible remained a fixed part of the furniture, supporting the famed symbol of respectability, the Aspidistra.[12]

Mrs Young's family occasionally attended St Thomas's and then, following a move to the Wren's Nest Estate in 1935, attended St Christopher's church only very rarely for special services. The Bible remained nonetheless important to the household. 'Years ago with the parents,' she observed, 'that was always the main thing in the house'.[13] For some, the family Bible was associated most clearly with one parent. Mr Beddoe's father was an agnostic former-Anglican and his mother a lapsed but believing Catholic. Mr Beddoe attended Lake Street, Primitive Methodist chapel Sunday School as a child, at his mother's insistence. If denomination was unimportant, the family Bible clearly was not: 'of course, we'd got a Bible and that was always kept in a special drawer'.[14]

The Bible was a symbol of the continuity of the extended family. Frequently a family heirloom,[15] it was considered the appropriate place in which to list the family tree.[16] Mrs Tomlins, for example, as an adult an infrequent church attender, owned a 'family Bible' which had belonged to her husband's parents, listing all the family names.[17] Mrs Mason, from a family of Gornal Methodists, commented both on the size of the family Bible and its additional contents:

> There's a Bible there [points...] that's the family Bible [...] it's been in the family a good many years [...] we names are in it, in the middle part [...] And they used to put the deaths in and the births and all that sort.[18]

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the presence of the family Bible in the home necessarily meant that it was regularly read.[19] Mr Latham of Gornal recalled that 'the

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[12] RPMSI, G21.

[13] RPMSI, D30. As adults, Mrs Young and her husband kept a New Testament on the hearth in their main room, though they too only rarely attended church. Cf. RPMS, D4 (re Mr Carter's family).

[14] RPMSI, G4.

[15] e.g. RPMSI, G8; RPMSI, G21.

[16] As Callum G. Brown noted in a recent paper (Birmingham University Religious History Seminar Series, February 1998).

[17] RPMSI, G29.

[18] RPMSI, G22. See also RPMSI, G15.

[19] A Mass-Observation report of 1944 which found high levels of ownership of the Bible found that only one in four respondents read it regularly, whilst a survey of over 2000 people for the *Daily Graphic* four years later, in which 90% owned a Bible, found that just one in ten read it regularly (M-O A: FR 1994, 'Interim Report on Religious Instruction in Schools', p. 3; M-O A: FR 3027, no title, August 1948, p. 1). Similarly, a survey of residents on a Hull Council estate in the 1980s

Bible wasn't read a great deal' in his parents' home.[20] Mr and Mrs Hood, both lifelong regular attenders at Ruiton Congregational chapel, whose respective parents were occasional attenders at Ruiton, recalled 'we had Bibles in the houses, but we hardly ever picked them up, to be honest.' Nor did they, as adults, regularly read the Bible privately, despite their regular involvement with Ruiton chapel.[21] Mr Raybould put it most bluntly. His father never attended church or chapel, whilst his mother, he recalled, attended whichever church or chapel offered the best hope of charity or doles at the time. The Bible was significant for its presence in the home, rather than for any practice of reading: 'Oh yes, we always had a family Bible. But it was never looked at'.[22]

Nevertheless, the Bible was felt to be a powerful source of personal reassurance and comfort, particularly amongst women. For some, the Bible itself, over and above the communication of the verbal promises it offered, possessed an almost talisman-like quality of protection and comfort. Mrs Griffiths, for example, who rarely read her Bible as an adult, nevertheless kept it at her bedside:

> What I did every night was touch it before I went to sleep, you know it was there. It's still there, isn't it? It was always in the dressing table drawer.[23]

For others, however, specific Biblical passages provided a strong sense of the existence of a loving and faithful God, an ever-present friend. Both regular and occasional churchgoers had favourite Bible passages which reflected this enjoyment of the reassurance derived from a belief in God's providential care either in the course of one's mortal life, or in the life to come. Favourite Bible passages, like favourite hymns, also provided many respondents with a line of personal biographical continuity, sometimes a nostalgic experience, linking them to their childhoods when they first encountered such passages at Sunday school, whilst respondents' own Bibles, often originating as Sunday school prizes or as family heirlooms, reinforced this

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which found that 75% of respondents owned Bibles, also found that nearly two thirds of respondents stated they never read them (Peter G. Forster, 'Residual religiosity on a Hull council estate', *Sociological Review*, 37 (August 1989), pp. 474-504 (p. 483)).

[20] RPMSI, G21.

[21] RPMSI, G15. Cf. RPMSI, D4 and D30.

[22] RPMSI, G25.

[23] RPMSI, D10.

sense of continuity.[24] Miss Haywood, a lifelong Methodist at 'Wesley' Chapel, Dudley, Mrs Homer, a Gornal Salvation Army member and Mrs Mason, a Lower Gornal Methodist, all counted Psalm 23 ('The Lord is my shepherd') amongst their favourites since their youth, whilst Mrs Cash, a lifelong attender at St Edmund's church, Dudley, referred to Psalm 139, similarly concerned with God's ever-present providential care. Psalm 121 ('I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills'), again expressing faith in divine care, was a favourite of Mrs Homer and Mrs Cash. Also a favourite with several interviewees was John 14, v. 2: 'In my Father's house are many mansions'.[25] For Mrs Childs, the truth of the passage was authenticated when Jesus came to take her mother from her death-bed.[26]

Amongst those who only occasionally read the Bible, it was sometimes turned to as a source of strength or wisdom during times of difficulty. The Bible, in the Wren's Nest Estate childhood home of Mrs Young, was only occasionally opened:

> I suppose it was [read] at times [...] I suppose it would be special times or if anybody was feeling a little bit down, they'd open the Bible and read through it and it would pick them up a bit, you know.[27]

For such occasional readers of the Bible, with only tenuous adulthood connections with associational religion, a form of bibliomancy was a means to seek either guidance or comfort. Mrs Griffiths, for example, stated:

> I can't say as I've read it religiously. I have picked it up and opened the page and I have looked at it and I have read whatever page it opened [...] I just opened it and read a page [...] A couple of times when Den [her husband] was in hospital [...] I have read that page - don't ask me which one - and thought, 'Oh that's strange'.[28]

Mrs Griffiths, like a number of other interviewees, only rarely turned to the Bible for guidance during her young adulthood, when life was busy and relatively untroubled:

> It was always packed away in a box with me other [Sunday school] prizes [...] It seems that I only went when I was in deep trouble or disturbed. While we were healthy and while we were

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[24] In some cases, the Sunday school prize Bible became a family heirloom. Mrs Sarah Marsh of Lower Gornal, for example, born in 1884, was presented with a Bible in eight successive years for regular attendance at Zoar Chapel Young Women's Bible Class, and later presented one of these Bibles to each of her six children in turn (*BCB*, February 1977).

[25] E.g. RPMSI, D6 and G25.

[26] RPMSI, D6, G25 and G7. For death bed experiences, see chapter 6.

[27] RPMSI, D30.

[28] RPMSI, D10. The experiences during her husband's illness were post-1965.

> working and doing good for others along the way whenever we could, it never seemed to see the daylight but as soon as something happens it gives you a jolt.[29]

Similarly, Mr Grainger found that during the busy years of rearing a young family he not only fell away from involvement with church, but rarely turned to the Bible. Widowed in his early forties in 1958, however, he returned to the church, now at St Francis's on the Priory Estate, and also returned to the Bible for guidance, informed by the teachings he obtained from regular attendance at church services and active involvement in church affairs:

> In the Bible, whatever passage you want to read, you go to that passage. If you're in difficulty and you think, 'Where will I get help? I want help here', then you can get it from your Bible you see [...] To me I think that all answers are in the Bible [...] I would look for a particular story I knew about.[30]

Parishioners were encouraged by their priests to use the Bible as a source of guidance. In 1935, a member of the clergy of St Thomas's Dudley was delighted to find a parishioner had a list of thirty-three Bible extracts for various situations, twenty-one of which were considered appropriate for some form of suffering, sorrow or other mental disquiet. He reprinted the list in the parish magazine for the benefit of his other parishioners.[31]

The capacity of the Bible to bring solace extended, for some, to almost curative powers. As a girl in the 1920s, Mrs Childs, a Methodist at Mount Zion chapel, Upper Gornal, read from the Bible to the sick child of a neighbour:

> his mind used to be fixed on me [...] And I says, 'Our Mum, it's doing Frankie good' [...] because a lot of the Bible stories were like Frankie. They were poorly and Jesus healed them. It was as though the Lord turned it when I opened the Book. 'Suffer the little children to come to me' or Jairus's daughter [...] Sometimes I would only read the one about Jesus going to Jairus's home. And I would creep out and tell Mrs Burgess he was asleep - and he couldn't sleep sometimes.[32]

More commonly, however, the Bible was considered to provide moral guidance. In its most modest form, this was one aspect of a common belief that religion was appropriate fare for the guidance of children and that if they did not learn any good from it, they could not learn any bad from the Bible:

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29 RPMSI, D10.
30 RPMSI, D12.
31 *Parish Magazine of St Thomas, Dudley*, August 1935.
32 RPMSI, G7.

> I do think as learning them [children] about God at school doesn't do any harm. Because you can never learn no wrong out of the Bible. If you don't learn good from it you can never learn no wrong.[33]

Belief in the power of the Bible as a protective charm has been shown to have been characteristic of soldiers in the First World War and of London residents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[34] In Gornal, the Bible was valued by some, not only for its contents and its symbolic power within the home, but also for a power to bring protection to the home. The enactment of a ritual involving a Bible, a piece of coal and a piece of bread survives amongst some (mainly older) Gornal residents, both regular and irregular churchgoers, irrespective of denomination, though oral testimony provided no evidence of its survival in Dudley. Mrs Healey and Mrs Grundy, both Gornal Anglicans, recalled the custom and its strict observance.[35] Mrs Griffiths, who was born in Dudley and attended a Methodist Sunday school but rarely attended any place of worship as an adult, moved to Gornal in the 1950s and there first encountered the belief:

> when you moved into a new house, or you moved at all, you should always take a piece of bread, a piece of coal and a Bible. She was the one [a friend from Gornal], the day we had the keys to move into this house, she presented me with it and I've still got me Bible and it's on the bedside table.[36]

The daughter of Mrs Clark, whose family were occasional attenders at Lake Street Methodist chapel in Lower Gornal, recalled being taught the ritual and its significance by her parents:

> she taught us, which I taught to my children and they've always done, if you go to a new house the first thing that you should walk through the door with, is your Bible. Oh yes, yes. That was always taught by mum and dad, that you'd always got to take a Bible. That's got to be the first thing into the house, with a piece of coal and a piece of bread, and you'd always have the Lord and a good wish, your heating and your food. That's gone back years and years [...] although dad was never religious.[37]

The cross was also regarded by some as having a quasi-miraculous or magical power. Such a belief was characteristic of residents of Southwark in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and of soldiers during the First World War, many of whom carried little

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[33] Mrs Tomlins (RPMSI, G29).
[34] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 131-34.
[35] RPMSI, G12.
[36] RPMSI, D10.
[37] RPMSI, G8.

crucifixes, and believed the cross had miraculous powers of protection or indestructibility.[38] In 1940, Mass-Observation reporters noticed pendant crucifixes amongst a variety of other 'superstitious' and 'astrological' lucky charms for sale in London shops.[39]

In Dudley and Gornal the cross or crucifix remained a prized possession, and one which was seemingly regarded as a gift appropriate as an expression of personal love or paternal or quasi-paternal care, a taste apparently supported by the commercial availability of crosses of various materials and sizes, sometimes with the addition of messages and other emotive symbols (like hearts). A small number continued to believe the crucifix had miraculous or magical attributes, though such beliefs seemed to be confined to those with links with the Church of England. Mrs Grundy and Mrs Healey both owned crucifixes which, they believed, had supernatural qualities. Mrs Healey was a regular attender at St James's Lower Gornal, and the high value she placed on her crucifix, a gift of Father Elliott, priest at Lower Gornal during the 1960s and 1970s, was one component of an Anglo-Catholic emphasis on the presence of the supernatural in 'holy' objects. Nevertheless, her understanding of its significance was idiosyncratic and personal, for she claimed that the crucifix lit up at moments of personal significance, announcing, for example, the death of her sick son before she had received news of it.[40] Mrs Grundy, also a worshipper at St James's since moving to Gornal on marriage in 1951, believed that her necklace cross, a gift from her father when she was seventeen years old, secured for her blessings, though all else in life was a matter of 'fate'.[41] Belief in the magical power of the crucifix was sometimes left inarticulate. The Reverend Alan Hayward, curate at St Christopher's on the Wren's Nest Estate between 1956 and 1959, recalled a female parishioner whose son was in prison and who, when he once visited her, took him down into her cellar to show him a crucifix with a luminous point. Its significance was not explained but he was convinced that there was some 'strong superstition' in its power for good.[42]

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[38] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 129-31; Cairns, *Army and Religion*, p. 43; Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (1978), p. 131.

[39] M-O A: FR 44, 'Astrology', March 1940, pp. 17-19.

[40] RPMSI, G12.

[41] RPMSI, G12.

[42] Private telephone conversation with the author, unrecorded.

The majority of interviewees who owned crucifixes, however, apparently did not believe they had such magical or miraculous powers, but nevertheless drew a strong, if vague and inexplicable, sense of reassurance from, and attachment to, a cross either as a personal or domestic adornment. Mrs Richards, for example, a resident of the Wren's Nest Estate and occasional attender at St Francis's as an adult, bought a solid brass cross as a young woman in the early 1960s.

> You know, if I go in the bedroom and my husband has moved it, I don't like it to be moved. I like it to be where I put it [...] I had a cross on a chain and the chain fell to bits but I've still got it, I can't throw it away.[43]

Mrs Young, another Wren's Nest resident who attended St Christopher's Sunday school but rarely attended any place of worship as an adult felt similarly attached to her pendant cross.

> I've always had a cross. When I lost one my daughter-in-law bought me another one [...] I felt lost without it. I mean I've always worn one. I felt really lost.[44]

The Bible, and teachings derived from it, also significantly shaped specific aspects of popular religious doctrine and knowledge. A belief in God was importantly shaped by Christian theology amongst irregular as well as regular churchgoers. In particular, the person of Jesus remained, for many people, fundamental to their beliefs, whether they believed in, or even understood, the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity.[45] In a parish magazine article in 1949, the incumbent of St Christopher's church on the Wren's Nest Estate argued that many

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[43] RPMSI, D23.

[44] RPMSI, D30.

[45] During the first half of the twentieth century, the national evidence concerning beliefs about the human and divine aspects of the person of Jesus is far from conclusive. According to Cairns, the majority of soldiers on the Western Front during World War I had only a dim notion of Jesus as 'the best of men'. Most, Cairns claimed, had accepted that Jesus was God during their childhood, but the belief had faded, leaving adult memories of the man, his deeds and hymns about, and pictures of him (Cairns, *Army and Religion* (1919), pp. xxviii, 31, 46-7, 49-50). Mass-Observation researchers in the mid-twentieth century found significantly higher levels of popular belief in Christ's divinity than Cairns had found thirty years earlier: 44% of men and 60% of women believed Jesus was 'more than a man', with no tidy correlation between belief and attendance at church (Mass-Observation, *Puzzled People*, p. 42). For some of the original material on which these conclusions are based, see M-O A: FR 2284, 'Half-Way Thinking', September 1945. In a Gallup Poll of 1955, 71% stated that they believed that Jesus was the son of God; by 1963 the figure had dropped to 60% (G. Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975*, Volume 1 (New York, 1976), pp. 405 and 682). In surveys of 1965 and 1968 64% and 85% believed that Jesus was the son of God (Svennevig *et al.*, *Godwatching*, pp. 30-1).

people acknowledge that Christ is the son of God, without the belief affecting their lives.[46] By the end of the period it seemed to local clergymen that whilst belief in the unique goodness of Jesus may well still have been common, belief in, or awareness of the claims to his divinity were a good deal less so. Paul Tongue, curate at St Edmund's church, Dudley in the early 1960s, recalled:

> My impression was that basically people thought that Jesus was a very good man, exceptional, almost unique in terms of his ability to teach and open the windows of heaven for us, but any notion of credal statements [...] the great Nicea arguments, they need to be re-preached [... Jesus was believed to be] the greatest prophet, the greatest no argument. If Jesus is the greatest prophet that makes me a Christian.[47]

Oral evidence about local beliefs for the period as a whole is a good deal more ambiguous. Certainly there is evidence that the question of Christ's divinity was scarcely a matter of priority for some, and that the theology of the different churches on this matter was not widely known. Mr Hammond's mother was from a family of occasional attenders at St Thomas's or St Luke's, Dudley, whilst the young Mr Hammond accompanied his father in attendance at Vicar Street Methodist Young Men's Bible Class. When, at the age of 10, he began at the local 'Baylies School', however, he began attending the Sunday school at the nearby Unitarian Old Meeting House in Wolverhampton Street, for purely practical reasons:

> I went to the Baylies School and [...] there was a grant or something from a well-to-do person who supplied the clothing for the children who went to the Baylies School who attended the Sunday School itself [...] it was a case of going because you got a new suit, it was a money factor in a sense. You got your free clothing from the school and I was the oldest of six and money wasn't flowing [laughs].

The Unitarian creed was evidently communicated successfully through the Sunday School, and Christ's role as an exemplar was accepted by Mr Hammond:

> Oh, I got that difference, that there was a God and there was Jesus.
>
> Q. And Jesus was just a very good man?
>
> Yes [...] I think there was a reason for him being crucified, that he was putting a message over to the rest of the community.[48]

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[46] *Parish Magazine of St Francis*, January 1949.
[47] Reverend Paul Tongue, interview with the author.
[48] RPMSI, D15.

For some the question of whether Christ was merely human or divine was a mystery, and one which they did not feel the need to fathom. Mrs Healey, born in 1914, a lifelong attender at St James's, Lower Gornal, referred to the mystery of the 'Three in One', but went on to assert that her belief had always been that Jesus was simply a very good man.[49] Others, little involved in institutional religion after leaving Sunday school, explicitly admitted that the issue remained impenetrable to them. Mrs Kenny, born in Lower Gornal in 1935, attended Ruiton Congregational Sunday school as a child, but only attended special services after leaving Sunday School. Her beliefs about Jesus were associated with the narrative of his life and the Nativity story rather than with a belief in his divinity,[50] but she had nevertheless been left with an awareness of the mystery of the Trinity:

> I don't really associate Jesus with God. Jesus was somebody that was born, you relate to it because of reading the Bible at Christmas, and then he grows up and has his life and then others thought he was God, didn't they? I don't know whether I've cracked it, I know they're the same person, but there was two separate.[51]

Some of those whose adult contacts with institutional religion were few, but who were brought up in Nonconformist chapels as children and lived their adult lives within an environment profoundly influenced by Evangelical beliefs, were convinced of Jesus' divinity. Mrs Tomlins, for example, brought up in a Wesleyan chapel in Coseley, moved to Gornal on her marriage in 1951 and was surrounded by the Strict Baptist family of her husband, though she rarely attended chapel herself. The teaching of Sunday school retained, for her, a strong sense of reality and relevance, though the precise nature of the persons of 'Lord' and 'Son' are somewhat unclear:

Q. You said that you were taught at Sunday school that Jesus - 'the great man' - that he was God? Is that something you stopped believing?

No, I still believe as he's Lord. I'm a strong believer in that.

Q. That Jesus was God's son?

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[49] RPMSI, G12.

[50] Cf. the changes in emphasis in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Methodist theology from soteriology to Christology, from Jesus as sacrificial lamb to Jesus as man, discussed in Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (1968), pp. 117-22; also Charles H. Goodwin, 'A System of Aggression: Motives, Methods and Margins of Methodist Growth with Special Reference to the Growth of Methodism on Cannock Chase, 1776-1893' (PhD thesis, Wolverhampton University, 1996), p. 260.

[51] RPMSI, G20.

> Oh yeah, God's son. I believe as there was a Lord and Jesus was his Son. It's up to everybody but I'm a strong believer in that. I am.[52]

Other interviewees, divorced from institutional religion from an early age, had picked up from Sunday school a strong belief in Jesus. Mr Beech, of Lower Gornal, born in 1927, carried the belief into adult life, since it was 'drummed into us' in childhood,[53] and Mr Slater, who attended St Luke's Sunday school as a child before moving to the Wren's Nest Estate, when asked whether he had believed that Jesus was God's son, answered simply, 'Yes, that's what we were told. I still believe it'.[54] Mr Beddoe, born in 1921, attended Lake Street Sunday school as a child, but lost contact with the church as a young adult. He was, however, emphatic in his beliefs about Jesus, formed during his early years:

> Whatever happens I always think about those early, my early chapel days. And I think it is God that is in charge of us. I mean you've got all these things now, with people saying about Jesus not being the Son of God, just another ordinary mortal. But I mean, you imagine the Bible, it's unique, not just now but for thousands of years.
>
> Q. You think Jesus was the son of God?
> Oh yes, yes.[55]

For many on the fringes of associational religion as adults, belief in Jesus' divinity was a matter of fact, accepted from childhood but not central to the concerns of adult religiosity. Within the churches which emphasised evangelical Atonement theology, Christ's divinity was, of course, central. Mr Fletcher, a Lower Gornal regular Lake Street Methodist and occasional attender at Eve Lane Pentecostal church, stated the matter plainly:

> What have you got left? If Christ ain't God, he's just an ordinary man. He might be a princely man, but only a man. So once you've lost that, you've lost it all.[56]

Such emphatic beliefs were not, however, entirely restricted to the constituency of regular churchgoers. Their influence extended to some of those whose contacts with institutional religion were restricted to their early years, but whose exposure to formal religious teaching

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[52] RPMSI, G29.
[53] RPMSI, G6.
[54] RPMSI, D26.
[55] RPMSI, G4. Cf. RPMSI, D28 and D30, where Mr and Mrs Young frequently referred to 'the Lord' who, they explained, was Jesus.
[56] RPMSI, G10.

was in the context of old-fashioned salvationist preaching. Mrs Brooks, born in 1905 in Gornal Wood, attended Zoar chapel as a child and a teenager, although her attendance at chapel thereafter was occasional rather than regular, her connections with chapel further weakened when she moved to Brierley Hill after marriage. Her younger brother, born in 1922, likewise attended Zoar Sunday school but left when he reached his mid-teens. For both, however, their Sunday school teaching informed a lifelong belief on this matter:

Q. Did you believe Jesus was just a good man or more than that?
Mrs If you're a Christian you believe in more than that.
Mr Oh, you do.

Q. That he was God?
Mr It's in the Scriptures and that's what you believe in.

Q. What did he come to earth for?
Mrs Well he came to die, didn't he, to save us from our sins [...] He gave his blood for all of us.[57]

For those who were most emphatically cut off from institutional religion, the recollection of religious expressions, and their continued emotional power, particularly in the form of prayer, were expressive of a religiosity which was affective and incoherent, perhaps comforting in its familiarity, rather than theologically consistent. Mrs Heath, who lived on the Wren's Nest Estate, was amongst the small group of interviewees who had experienced very little contact with the churches either in childhood or adulthood and was inclined to be sceptical about the possibility of an afterlife. Nevertheless, she prayed regularly, particularly in later life, drawing on knowledge acquired during her childhood. The question of the person of Jesus seems not to have been an issue of any importance, though her prayers were addressed to him:

Q. Who did you think Jesus was?
I don't know. A good man like anybody else [...] I could tell you what I say - the Lord's Prayer and the Grace of the Lord Jesus.[58]

The importance of Jesus within popular religious belief - whether as God on earth, or as the perfect expression of humanity - was established during childhood, through the shared experience of Sunday school and, in many cases, through the teaching of parents.

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[57] RPMSI, G2.
[58] RPMSI, D18.

Most interviewees recalled being taught about Jesus at Sunday school through lessons on the Gospels. Moreover, hymns learnt at, and remembered from, Sunday school were frequently concerned with Jesus and his loving care for the individual. Some were intended specifically for children. Mrs Causer, who attended Sunday school at Priory Methodist chapel and St Francis's church in the 1930s, and attributed her return to the church in later life to this early experience, recalled amongst her favourite hymns learnt there, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, For the Bible tells me so'.[59] For several interviewees the hymn, 'What a friend we have in Jesus', learnt at Sunday School, remained a favourite.[60]

Hymns and songs were reinforced through visual images of Jesus. A female questionnaire respondent born in 1904 recalled the magic lantern shows given at 'Wesley' United Methodist chapel, Wolverhampton Street, vividly recalling one particular slide (probably Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World') of Jesus knocking on a door, and singing a hymn, 'Knocking, knocking, Who is there?'[61] Sunday school rooms were adorned with such familiar images of Jesus, which remained vivid in the memories even of those who, as adults, retained little or no religious faith.[62] Mr Bailey, who attended Ruiton Congregational Sunday school in the 1920s and early 1930s recalled:

> One of the things I do remember - and I can see it as clearly as if I was looking at it now - was Jesus standing with a rod and a lamp and he was standing by a door, and it was 'I am the light of the world'. And I remember that as clear as anything. By a door in the Sunday school at Ruiton.[63]

Sunday school prizes, which many interviewees - churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike - kept as treasures, also sometimes bore pictures of Jesus, images which were recalled years later. Mr Latham had his first Sunday school prize from Himley Road Wesleyan Methodist chapel before he had reached the age of four: 'It had got a picture on the front of Jesus and a Lamb, you know the Good Shepherd, and I kept that book for a long, long time'.[64] For children

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[59] RPMSI, D6.

[60] e.g. Mrs Hood (RPMSI, G15); also the mother of Mrs Childs (RPMSI, G7).

[61] Questionnaire number 121. J.H.S. Kent described Hunt's 'Light of the World' as 'Sankey and moody in oils' (J.H.S. Kent, 'The Role of Religion in the Cultural Structure of the Later Victorian City', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23, 5th series (1973), pp. 153-73 (p. 173)).

[62] *DH*, 11 June 1921 describes the Sunday school of Zoar United Methodist chapel with pictures and words from the Bible on the walls for the benefit of children of 'working folk'.

[63] RPMSI, G1.

[64] RPMSI, G21.

of families with little in the way of disposable income, prizes for regular attendance at Sunday school generated considerable pleasure and excitement, and the images which they conveyed became associated nostalgically with such pleasure. Mrs Smart, a child on the Priory Estate in the 1930s and 1940s, attended St Francis's Sunday school regularly until the age of 14, because 'I liked my leaflets - pictures of Jesus and all that. I liked them and collected them'.[65]

Parental teaching reinforced the sense the enduring friendly image of Jesus. Prayers were habitually addressed to Jesus, a habit initiated for many with a nightly recital of 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild', taught by mothers.[66] Well into adulthood, prayers were addressed to Jesus not only by those who remained regular churchgoers but also, privately, by those who did not. Mrs Griffiths, for example, has, throughout her life, prayed to Jesus despite rarely attending church since her teens.[67] Mr Carter, who lived on the Wren's Nest Estate and rarely attended church after leaving Sunday school, stated that both he and his wife had prayed to 'the Lord' (a term interchangeable for Mr Carter with 'Jesus' and 'Him above'):

> We used to say to ourselves, 'We don't go to church, but when we go to bed we can pray, can't we?' And if your mother was in hospital, you'd go to bed and ask the Lord to help her to get better and different things. And if anything went wrong, you'd think well I've prayed and something's happened to her, at the end like. That's the first thing you say, 'Oh Lord help me'.[68]

God's intervention in the Contemporary World

Belief in an answer to prayer was, for most people, the extent to which a belief in the possibility of contemporary miracles stretched. In almost all cases - regular and irregular church attenders alike - such belief was founded on personal knowledge of cases of unexpected recovery from illness. Indeed, for many people good health was identified as their most important lifelong concern,[69] and God's active interest in such a fundamental matter seemed both appropriate and credible.

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[65] RPMSI, D25.

[66] e.g. RPMSI, D20, D5, G5, G10, G22.

[67] RPMSI, D10.

[68] RPMSI, D4.

[69] A final question asked of most interviewees was 'What do you consider to have been the most important thing in life for you, up to the present?' The fact that most interviewees were over 60 years old would, in all likelihood, increase the likelihood that 'health' would be identified amongst the major concerns. It should be added, however, that many interviewees also identified periods

Even where scientific explanations seem to be readily available, the concept of the miracle still seemed, for many, more appropriate. Whilst the professionalisation of medicine and the arrival of the National Health Service may well have undermined one element of working-class communal mutual assistance, with the diminishing role of the local woman who acted as midwife and healer,[70] it did not automatically popularise scientific assumptions about the causes of health and illness. Indeed, it may well be that the increasing access to medical care offered to the working class by the NHS produced more occasions of the sort of unexpected recovery which was popularly deemed miraculous. Miss Hopkins, for example, born in 1915 and a lifelong attender at Ruiton Congregational chapel, maintained that attributions of healings to science were akin to a belief in 'magic', a denial of the sovereignty of Divine providence:

> Q. Has there been anything in your life you consider miraculous?
> I always think that all things depend on God's will. I think if somebody's ill it will come right in the end. I don't believe in magic, no. I believe if it's God's will that certain person will recover, and things like that you know.
>
> Q. How is magic different?
> Well, I don't know. Some people think if something happens it's due to some cleverness or something like that. Due to man's science. But they can only go so far can't they? They can't do what God can do, if He's willing.[71]

Biblical authority and, in particular a familiarity with the Gospel stories, underpinned a belief in miraculous healings. Jesus' acts of healing were, amongst non-church-attenders as well as regular attenders, a vividly and spontaneously remembered part of the Gospel stories. Mr Beech, whose mother's sight was restored, referred to the accounts of Jesus' healings as his favourites from the Bible, recalled from Sunday school lessons. Mrs Tomlins, interviewed in the company of her sceptical husband, was insistent that she had always believed in the accounts of Jesus' healings.[72]

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earlier in their lives which were affected by concerns over illness, either of themselves or of close family, during which they became more acutely aware of the role of religious belief in their lives. A similar question posed by Mass-Observation to a much wider age-range in the 1940s produced a list of ultimate concerns, the four most frequent of which were happiness, health, family and doing good, after which came 'money' (*Puzzled People*, p. 105).

70 Mary Chamberlain and Ruth Richardson, 'Life and Death', *Oral History*, 11, No.1 (1983), pp. 31-43.

71 RPMSI, G14.

72 RPMSI, G29.

A belief in the possibility of miraculous healing was also encouraged by its increasing, and in some cases very public, emphasis among some churches. Local clergymen occasionally encouraged an understanding of prayer which adduced the improbability of an event as evidence of divine intervention in response to prayer.[73] National developments reinforced such a position. Within the Church of England increased emphasis was given to healing in the post-war years. Although steps were taken early in the century to revive the spiritual means of healing, the development was accelerated in 1952 when the revival of spiritual healing was debated in the Convocation of Canterbury. A Commission was established, consisting of churchmen, theologians and medical practitioners and its report published in 1958 gave cautious approval to the notion that the Church was commissioned to heal the sick and that ordination conveyed a 'sacramental ministry for the strengthening of body and soul'.[74] The parish magazine of St Thomas's in June 1954, for example, urged readers to join in the 'Silent Minute', a world-wide daily uniting in prayer for 'all who are connected with healing movements everywhere'.[75] Four months later, Reverend Richard Horton, incumbent at Richards Castle in Shropshire, and missioner at St Francis's three years earlier, spoke to St Francis's Fellowship on spiritual healing.[76] Just over a year later again, the Dudley Deanery ended a series of talks with one on the gift of Spiritual Healing, the Laying-on of hands and the Sacrament of Unction.[77]

Amongst regular churchgoers, beliefs in healing were significantly inflected by the theologies of the different churches. The Anglo-Catholic St Edmund's church propagated a belief in miraculous healing associated with sites of pilgrimage, with saints and with the Virgin Mary, especially from the early 1960s when visits to Walsingham from St Edmund's (and from

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[73] e.g. *St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher' Church*, May 1948.

[74] Paul A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 64-6. For a brief account of these developments and of the somewhat controversial Christian Healing Mission in the 1920s, see Stewart Mews, 'Religious Life betweeen the Wars, 1920-1940', in Sheridan Gilley and W.J. Sheils (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 449-66 (pp. 456-58, and 472); *idem*, 'The revival of spiritual healing in the Church of England 1920-26', in W.J. Shiels (ed.), *The Church and Healing*, Studies in Church History vol. 19 (Oxford, 1982), pp. 299-331.

[75] *Parish Magazine of St Thomas*, June 1954.

[76] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, October 1954.

[77] *Parish Magazine of St Edmund*, January 1956.

St James's, Lower Gornal) started.[78] In May 1965, St Edmund's parish magazine reported that miracles had taken place as a result of intercessions and water from the Holy Well at Walsingham, and mentioned a local example of a Dudley girl, the sister of a member of the congregation, 'tormented by a serious mental disorder' and despaired of by the medical and psychiatric establishment. When members of St Edmund's congregation, visiting Walsingham, asked the Virgin Mary to pray for the girl who remained in Dudley, she was reported to have enjoyed the first restful night for a long time and showed her first signs of recovery (before later recovering fully) at the time the Dudley pilgrims visited the shrine, though, the report claimed, she had not even known about the visit to Walsingham.[79] Similarly, Mrs Grundy, a friend of Mrs Healey, the latter a regular attender at St James's Lower Gornal (from which visits to Walsingham were also arranged), attested to the miraculous healing effects of the holy water of Walsingham:

> when my mother was poorly, when she had that slight heart attack when she was living with me, you [Mrs Healey] gave me a small bottle of holy water from Walsingham and my mother was in bed and I put that bottle to her lips and she lived another six years after that. We didn't think she would get up no more, but she did and we always said it was that water.[80]

By the 1960s, spiritual healing was also being given greater emphasis within the Nonconformist churches as a result of the movement of charismatic renewal.[81] Amongst evangelicals and Pentecostalists, the work of the Holy Spirit was believed to effect healings, and to free believers from physical and mental handicaps. Some cases were far from dramatic, but given a significance by the understanding of those involved. Caleb Beardsmore, for example, a Gornal cobbler and the founder and long-time pastor of Eve Lane Pentecostal church, was afflicted with a terrible stutter, but freed of it at his conversion, a change noted by many local evangelical Christians.[82] Mrs Fletcher, an Eve Lane Pentecostalist since childhood

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[78] The local Anglo-Catholic churches were, in this respect, drawing on, and aligning themselves with, the Roman Catholic emphasis on the importance of Walsingham from 1948 and the growth of Mariolatry culminating in the definition of the Assumption in 1950 (see Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990*, 3rd edition (1991), pp. 480-82).

[79] *Parish Magazine of St Edmunds, Dudley*, May 1965.

[80] RPMSI, G12.

[81] David Bebbington, 'The Decline and Resurgence of Evangelical Social Concern 1918-1990', in John Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980* (1995), pp. 175-97 (pp. 186-87).

[82] RPMSI, G17.

in the 1940s, related a similar sense of release from physical constraints and a movement into a supernatural plane of experience:

> I'm not well most of the time. And Sunday mornings, not so much in the last few years because I've had the grandchildren, and when I get up to pray, having got there, I don't know how, I start in my own words and then the Holy Spirit takes over, there's a release in the spirit.[83]

Healings within the charismatic movement were, of course, sometimes more orchestrated than this. Mr Dickens, a lifelong Dudley Methodist, recalled the increasing popularity of healing services within the local Methodist churches in the 1960s, when preachers with a 'healing ministry' were invited to take special services.[84] Several interviewees recalled the increasing popularity of such services in Dudley and Gornal, and nearby areas, and of the publicity which often preceded such events. To a large extent, attendance at such meetings was restricted to practising evangelical Christians. Mrs Jones, born in 1941 in Upper Gornal and a lifelong regular Methodist, recalled attending healing services with a group of friends in the 1950s:

> Oh yes. I remember we used to go to meetings and that and saw people healed and that. The one fellow I remember was Peter Scuthern. We used to go to Birmingham when he used to conduct campaigns and that when I was in my teens. [85]

The publicity for healing services was such, however, that they did attract some people who were infrequent attenders at any church, but inclined to believe in the possibility of miraculous healing. Mrs Carter, for example, recalled how the hopes of her mother in the 1960s for the restoration of the ability to walk were stimulated by the publicity produced by Eve Lane Pentecostal church, Upper Gornal, for their healing services.

> I think her did believe in it herself. And [...] certain times they used to have a faith healer go up to Eve Lane church and they was putting leaflets through the door and I picked this leaflet up one day, and [...] 'they've got a faith healer up so-and-so's church', [...] and my mother had a stroke and [...] her says, 'Oh I'd love to go to him' [...] And me sister offered to help so I said 'Alright, I can see her does want to go badly'. So anyway we took her and her believed

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[83] RPMSI, G10.
[84] RPMSI, D7.
[85] RPMSI, G19.

> then that one day her would walk, but she never did. It was just her way, herself, her always had her beliefs in different things like that.[86]

The hopes stimulated by such events could engender disappointment and scepticism and did so in this case for Mrs Carter herself. It did not require the rhetoric of institutional religion, however, to encourage non church-goers retrospectively to interpret unexpected recoveries as miracles. Mrs Tomlins, born in Coseley in 1930, married a Gornal man and moved to Lower Gornal in 1951, where she attended chapel only for baptisms, weddings and funerals. At the age of thirty-two she was in danger of permanently losing the sight of one eye due to diabetes. Though her sight was saved by an operation, it was regarded as a miracle - not of modern science - but of God:

> Well, when I was 32 I lost the sight of this eye and I was in [hospital] 6 weeks. I was in there a week and then they operated and I didn't think I'd get the sight back [...] It was a German doctor and he got my sight back. I rested there for 6 weeks with my eyes blindfold and I was in surgery for 3 hours. And he said when I thanked him, he said it was yourself that did it more than anything.[87]

Similarly, Mr Beech, born in Gornal in 1927, rarely attended church as an adult but described his mother's recovery of her eyesight following an operation as miraculous, and considered it equivalent to cases of people miraculously walking away from wheelchairs, reports of which he was aware.[88] Mr Beddoe, born in 1921 and brought up in Lake Street Sunday School, only occasionally attended church after leaving Sunday School aged fifteen. When he was seventeen, however, he suffered a serious illness and was bed-ridden for two months, then underwent a further month of convalescence. During this short period, he experienced a remarkable growth spurt of several inches in height. The miracle, as he considered it, was a release not only from physical, but also from mental, suffering, but the suffering itself, Mr Beddoe believed, had had a moral purpose:

> I was a terror. I think it was because I was small. My whole manner changed after. I was that big now [...] I became a different personality altogether. I think it was - it was an act of God - I mean I'd got to be shown both sides, and I was shown both sides and I was a better person for it.[89]

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[86] RPMSI, D4.
[87] RPMSI, G29.
[88] RPMSI, G6.
[89] RPMSI, G4.

The faith of some - particularly those for whom religious faith and the church have been central to their lives - in miracles in matters relating to illness and death was almost impregnable. Mrs Childs, for example, born in 1915 and a lifelong Upper Gornal Methodist, saw the hand of God both in healings and in death:

> I have seen miracles happen [pause] and I've said 'that's a miracle'. I remember one little girl she was knocked down at the top of Moden Hill, she was 7 years of age, had rheumatic fever, she had it 3 times [...] She died at 18 years [...] When she died, I says, 'Our mum, it's a miracle she's died, she's out of her misery, isn't she?' And her says 'Yes my wench'. Because it was not a life, was it? [...] People look at miracles in different ways don't they?
>
> Q. Miracles as people being...?
> Cured or taken, yes, 'cos they couldn't get better.[90]

Although the number of cases is so small as to make generalisation hazardous, it does seem that men, exposed to greater dangers in the workplace and more likely to be at the front line during war, were more likely to have direct experience of what they believed to be miraculous preservation from danger. Women, reflecting their role as carers, tended to recall unexpected recoveries from illness as miracles. There is little evidence to suggest a chronology of change in beliefs relating to miraculous recoveries or escapes from danger. It is possible, however, that a new emphasis on spiritual healing, not only in the Pentecostal churches, but also in the Church of England and in local Methodist churches from the late 1950s and 1960s contributed to the propensity for committed churchgoers to link recovery from serious illness with divine intervention.[91]

Occasionally a miraculous answer to prayer took the form of a turn for the better in economic affairs. Miss Haywood, born in 1922, a lifelong attender at Wesley Methodist chapel,

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[90] RPMSI, G7.

[91] Mr Dickens, a local preacher in the Dudley Methodist circuit, recalled the increasing popularity of healing services in the local churches with healers, such as Trevor Dearing, invited to services in the circuit (RPMSI, D7). The Pentecostal movement had included an emphasis on healing since its arrival in the area: Pastor Jeffreys, during his visits to Dudley in the 1920s, conducted healing services (RPMSI, G22), and Eve Lane Pentecostal church was still posting leaflets through doors advertising special healing services to the end of the period (RPMSI, D4). For the national evangelical emphasis on healing within the charismatic renewal of the 1960s, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 242 and David Bebbington, 'Decline and Resurgence of Social Concern', in John Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980* (1995), pp. 186-87.

Wolverhampton Street, found herself in early adulthood having to look after her ill and recently widowed mother, whilst commuting to Birmingham for work:

> One day off I was doing housework and I was really at the end of my tether and prayed to God to give me a job nearer to home. And next day [Sunday] I went to work [at chapel] and I was waiting for some Sunday School children to come and a man in church about the same age as me, a manager, brought his two boys and asked me if I knew where he could find a secretary. He had a small works, hand-made hearth furniture and all that [...] I started the new job the next week.[92]

Divine interest in apparently less serious matters, however, such as minor material comforts, usually did not seem so credible.[93] Mr and Mrs Carter, non church-goers who lived on the Wren's Nest Estate, were the only interviewees to attribute material success to God's will. Mr Carter was inclined to see God's hand potentially involved in the outcome of all uncertainties, including those recently and deliberately man-made:

> Mr It's him above, what He does that matters. It's him, He is the leader. If you won the lottery, He could be thinking up there, 'Oh it's his turn for the lottery', press the button and you win, it's what he puts in front of you.
> [...]
> Mrs Yes one day last week, something happened, I said the Lord's answered my prayer [...] He only had £10 and I looked at him and said it will grow, you will come back with more. Sometimes you say 'thank the Lord for that'. That £10 went to £30 and he did he won £20 on bingo. I said thank the Lord he's got £10 come a bit more, just talking sort of thing.[94]

That Mrs Carter was less comfortable with an image of a Great Caller in the Sky is suggested by her suffixing of 'just talking sort of thing'.

More common amongst church-goers and non church-goers was the attitude of Mrs Healey of Lower Gornal, a lifelong regular attender at St James's:

> Q. What would you have considered a miracle then?
> Well, if they get better. Not worldly things, nothing like that. Simple things like your family, if they're ill and wanting healing, that's more important than anything.[95]

Mr Slater, a Wren's Nest resident who has not attended church as an adult but believed in God, was clear that luck was something separate from God: 'I don't think luck's anything to do with

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92 RPMSI, D17. A very similar account, telling of a career in engineering pursued by way of openings provided by God, was related by Mr Hudson, a regular attender at St Paul's Protestant in Lower Gornal (RPMSI, G17).

93 cf. Svennevig *et al.*, *Godwatching*, p. 33 where only 38% of respondents to a survey felt it was right to pray for relief from money problems, whilst 39% felt it was wrong.

94 RPMSI, D4.

95 RPMSI, G12.

God, myself. I don't think that's anything to do with God, luck'.[96] Mr Sankey, born in 1922, a Zoar Sunday scholar as a boy, who has only occasionally attended church or chapel as an adult, believed in the life-saving miracle, but distinguished luck from miracles:

> the difference is, luck comes in when you get money. If you get money, that's luck, but it's not a miracle. It's like you say, something sort of happens that's more on your side sort of thing, that's a miracle. It's lucky if you get the horses, up, your coupons, the dogs, the lottery, it's not a miracle [laughs]. That's how I look at it anyway.[97]

The Supernatural in Everyday Life - God, Luck and Fate

A belief in luck as something more purposeful than pure chance was, for many people, one dimension of a belief in the intervention in human affairs of a force beyond material and worldly explanation. Folk traditions and superstitions existed alongside orthodox Christian beliefs and practices within the same family and the same individual, being communicated orally through the generations. They were held by both regular and irregular churchgoers. As the Reverend Paul Tongue, curate at St Edmund's during the 1960s, observed:

> I would think you would find as much difference within church-goers as anywhere. I think the folklore goes straight across, not folk against church. I think it's almost inherited and some families are more folkish than others.[98]

Admittedly there were those whose commitment to a belief in the sovereignty of God's Providence excluded *a priori* superstitious beliefs, and involvement with practices which sought to divine the future were considered diabolical. The teachings at the evangelical Methodist churches of Gornal were clear on such matters, and several interviewees whose life-stories were significantly shaped by the experience of conversion claimed to have rejected superstitious beliefs from an early age. Mr Latham, an attender at Lake Street chapel since his childhood in the 1920s and from the 1960s a local preacher, recalled:

> When we were younger we were always told, you know, not to use this word luck, you know. How do you use it - you might say 'As luck would have it', and they'd say 'Oi!' and you'd say 'Yeah, OK!' You know [...] and these St Christophers for travellers and all that sort of thing. Yeah, we were taught again, probably the folk at St Paul's [Protestant church, Lower Gornal, which he occasionally attended as a boy] would teach that we didn't do that sort of thing [...] they would say it was a lack of faith and trust in the one who guards and keeps, that sort of

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[96] RPMSI, D26.
[97] RPMSI, G2.
[98] Interview with the author.

> thing [...] Reading stars, you are beginning to delve into the realm of the occult [...] fortune tellers was taboo. And reading hands and tea-cups that was really right out.[99]

Mr Fletcher, a teenage convert and lifelong attender at Gornal Methodist chapels and, in later years, at Eve Lane Pentecostal church, also regarded all forms of fortune-telling as of the Devil and, to a question about luck, tersely replied 'it's a word I don't like to use'.[100] Mr Hudson, a Cliff College missioner in the Gornals in 1937, came to live in Gornal after the Second World War. He asserted that the local churches had discouraged superstitions and beliefs in luck: 'Oh yes, yes, definitely. Especially the Nonconformists, right the way through', a discouragement which, he believed, became emphatic as a result of the Cliff College missions to the villages in 1937 and 1948.[101] Mrs Jones, another teenage convert and lifelong Gornal Methodist, classified superstitious beliefs and practices on a scale from 'stupid' to 'dangerous'. In the former category were beliefs about lucky colours and churching, whilst lucky mascots and any attempts to divine the future were 'dangerous' and part of 'the enemy's tactics'. In particular, she recalled the activities of some local friends in the 1960s with the newly-fashionable ouija board and the desperate trouble in which they found themselves as a result. The resolution bears an obvious resemblance to priestly exorcism:

> A couple of friends were very involved with a ouija board many years ago. And in fact it had such an effect on their lives, they were in such a state and it was something that they really got hooked onto and it really took over their lives and they were in a terrible state. One of the ministers from the church went down to see them and they became Christians and their lives were changed, but there was a real power in their lives through the ouija board.[102]

Some of those who rejected superstitious beliefs nevertheless, like some of the Mass-Observation interviewees, paradoxically extended their influence by deliberately flouting them. Mr Fletcher and Mrs Homer, for example, both insisted that they always walked under ladders.[103] Others did not entirely escape their influence, admitting to having practised them by habit. Mr Latham, whose mother held certain superstitions including the belief that it was unlucky to put shoes on the table (a common local belief), laughingly admitted when asked whether he had retained any such beliefs, 'It's funny you should say that. I very often, you

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[99] RPMSI, G21.
[100] RPMSI, G10. Cf. RPMSI, G16.
[101] RPMSI, G17.
[102] RPMSI, G19.
[103] RPMSI, G10 and RPMSI, G16. For the Mass-Observation interviewees, see M-O A FR 2112, 'Superstition', 7 June 1944.

know, have to buff my shoes up and things like that. Even so, I still never put them on the table.'[104]

Popular beliefs that it was possible to influence one's own fate, to secure protection from misfortune and secure good fortune frequently took forms which bore little obvious resemblance to any aspect of orthodox Christianity. As the discussion of attitudes to Bibles and Crucifixes has suggested, however, some aspects of folk religious belief, however, involved the popular ascription of meanings to Christian ceremonies and Christian symbols, rejected and decried by clergymen as 'superstition'. Such reinterpretations were amongst the more enduring elements of folk religion, and often had particular significance for women, arising within contexts relating to childbirth, family and domestic routines.

As chapter 3 has shown, infant baptism retained a near universal popularity until the very end of the period, embracing not only regular churchgoers within denominations that encouraged the practice, but also the great majority of infrequent attenders. Studies of nineteenth-century popular religion have demonstrated that baptism was popularly understood to have magical effects, apparently a survival from a much earlier period, since Keith Thomas records the popular seventeenth-century belief that baptism promoted physical well-being.[105] Whilst generally arguing that such beliefs were gradually eradicated, Thomas concedes that 'in modern Britain there are many otherwise non-religious people who think it unlucky not to be baptised'.[106]

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[104] RPMSI, G21.

[105] John Kent, 'Feelings and Festivals: an interpretation of some working-class religious attitudes', in H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II (1973), pp. 855-71 (p. 864); Alan Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey, 1880-1939' (PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1987), p. 187; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 40-2.

[106] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 64. See also, Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 31-2. Mass-Observation commentators noted from secondary sources traditional superstitions which panel members had noted in contemporary contexts concerning the risk of ill-health resulting from failure to baptize. In Yorkshire and Northumberland 'baptism was regarded as affecting a child physically; and a sickly or puling babe was looked upon with suspicion as being unbaptized' (M-O A: TC Religion, 3/D, n.d). Similarly, David Clark's study of the fishing village of Staithes in the 1960s explores the significance of baptism in terms of the 'liminal' condition of the child before baptism, a state which threatened both spiritual and physical well-being (Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, pp. 113-19). That superstitious interpretations of baptism were current nationally in the mid twentieth century is clear from concerns expressed at the Methodist Conference (*Methodist Conference Minutes*, 1946, pp. 203-04).

The meaning of baptism in twentieth century Dudley and Gornal, at least for some, clearly continued to incorporate beliefs lying outside any orthodox definitions of the meaning of baptism. Local Anglican clergy expressed concern throughout the period. In 1938, Father Ferley, incumbent of St Edmund's church wrote, 'Our present method of Baptism encourages the idea that Baptism is a private matter on a par with vaccination so that people talk of taking baby to Church to have him "done".[107] The post-war years witnessed intensified debates about the theology of Christian initiation within the Church of England, resulting in the publication of Convocation's *Baptism and Confirmation Today*, which in turn stimulated further debate at diocesan and parochial level.[108] Whilst the official debate focused on the precise sacramental significance of baptism and confirmation, diocesan and parochial clergy were concerned with more fundamental popular misunderstandings (as they considered them). In 1958, the Bishop of Worcester wrote in the diocesan newsletter about those who have

> the natural virtues of love and affection and [...] want to do their best for their children. It has for centuries been the custom to have babies baptised; in a vague way they feel it does some good, quite what they do not know. So they go to the local parson and ask to have the baby "done". When the parson points out to them what the sacrament means and that they have to promise certain things, and that Godparents should be communicants, they are frankly perplexed.[109]

Locally, popular beliefs in, and attitudes towards, baptism persisted. In 1964, the Reverend J.W. Thorpe[110] explained in the parish magazine the significance of baptism which, he feared, was wholly misunderstood, and quoted a female parishioner who had recently asked him '"can my son be seen to on Sunday?"'.[111]

Some interviewees struggled towards some articulation of the notion of introducing the infant into the house of God or the family of God, in ways which suggested that this aspect of the ritual had not been fully incorporated within the traditions of popular religion, although this was clearly an important aspect of baptism for many interviewees.[112] As chapter 3 has shown,

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107 *Parish Magazine of St Edmund*, February 1938.
108 Welsby, *History of the Church of England*, pp. 61-4.
109 *Worcester Messenger*, November 1958.
110 Curate of St Christopher's, 1961-65.
111 *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, November 1964.
112 e.g. RPMSI, G12 (Mrs Healey and Mrs Grundy), D30 (Mr and Mrs Young), D22.

the popularity of baptism rested partly on social custom and the social significance of the event itself. But in popular religious belief baptism continued, for a minority, to be invested with quasi-magical, or quasi-medical, properties.[113] Several interviewees volunteered examples of the improved health or temperament of an infant following on from baptism, or of the chronic ill-health of children whose parents failed to get their child baptised quickly. Mrs Childs, a lifelong regular Methodist from Upper Gornal born in 1915, was convinced that baptism launched not only a child's spiritual but also his or her physical development:

> it's funny, I've always believed that until a baby is Christened you don't see that child grow, but after the baby's been Christened [...], they've been in the house of God [...] They don't seem to grow until they've been Christened. You can see a child develop after being Christened.[114]

Mrs Sankey, who attended an Anglican Sunday school in Stafford but has rarely attended church as an adult, and her husband and sister-in-law who attended Zoar Methodist Sunday School but have also been irregular adult church-goers, all felt that baptism helped a child to develop physically. The failure, amongst their own children's generation, to get infants baptised was a cause for concern:

> our daughter didn't have one of hers Christened, did she? The middle one 'til she was 10 to 12 months. And I used to worry about that because she hadn't had her Christened and I used to say to her you ought to have them Christened, because they always seem better after they've been Christened [...] because you'll see that she'll come on much better if she's been Christened'.
>
> Mr And funnily enough, she did an'all didn't she?[115]

The Reverend Alan Hayward[116] was aware that residents of the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates in the late 1950s feared 'something awful happening' if an infant was not baptised.[117]

Mrs Richards, an occasional church-goer on the Wren's Nest Estate born in 1941, had two children during the 1960s, and regarded baptism as an essential guarantee of their health:

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113 Cf. Howard Burrows, 'Religious Provision and Practice in Some Mainly Rural Poor Law Districts of the Lowland Marches 1815-1914', 2 volumes (unpublished CNAA doctoral thesis, 1991), volume 1, p. 427.

114 RPMSI, G7.

115 RPMSI, G2.

116 Curate, St Christopher's church, Wren's Nest Estate, 1956-59.

117 Private telephone conversation with the author, unrecorded.

> I think a child needs a blessing to help it through. I had a son and he had gastro-enteritis. He was in Park Hill Isolation Hospital and they rushed him in there and had him Christened straight away. And he was in there twelve months. But he pulled through. And I think with the Lord's blessing that's what helped him [...] I feel that the blessing did help. And during that twelve months, I had another child and when I brought him to be Christened I brought the other one to be Christened as well even though he was Christened.[118]

Such beliefs were not always counteracted by readier access to professional medical provision after the War, but sometimes even reinforced by the presence of nurses who shared the beliefs. Reverend Paul Tongue, curate at St Edmund's Dudley during the 1960s, moved to Amblecote, near Stourbridge in the early 1970s and recalled his work in the local hospital:

> The first two or three years at Amblecote, I spent trying to encourage nurses at the hospital not to put the fear of God into patients, because the implication of their whole attitude was, 'Well you can't expect us to do any good for your child if they've not been baptised'. So they were just compounding a superstition - they were only picking up on what was in the community as a whole.[119]

Such explicit beliefs were the preserve of a minority, but several other interviewees felt that an infant remained somehow incomplete until baptism, reflecting an ill-defined sense of what Clark terms 'liminality'. Mrs Tudor, for example, born in 1918 in central Dudley, attended St Thomas's Sunday school but rarely attended church as an adult. Infant baptism was, in her view, essential not simply as a matter of social custom, but for the well-being of the child. Asked why she felt it was so important, she replied, 'Well, I don't know. I think they might not be complete if anything happened to them'.[120]

Christening also provided a form of general insurance policy against future troubles, a base to which the adult could return. Mrs Causer, born in 1926 in Brewery Fields, Dudley, moved to the Priory Estate in 1932 and attended various Sunday schools but as a young adult cut her ties with church until she returned to a regular involvement at St Francis's around 1960. She had her children baptised and, although she rejected the idea that baptism helps the infant to 'come on better', she felt that parents should provide their children with 'something to fall back on' especially in the event of life's crises, and that Christening was part of that

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118 RPMSI, D23. Burrows also notes that second baptisms were sometimes sought to cure ailments (Burrows, 'Religious Provision', p. 427).

119 Interview with the author.

120 RPMSI, D28.

provision.[121] Mrs Griffiths, born in 1931, attended 'Wesley' Sunday school but rarely attended church as an adult. She had her three children baptised since

> I think that perhaps in some time in their lives, how can I put it, there might be a need. I don't know how or when or what. But I do think that they should have something. They never did take to chapel, did they? But I do really think that - although I don't go regular myself - I think that it's a connection. You've got to have something - I don't know how to put it - something to come back to later in life.[122]

As a moment of transition, the Christening was popularly regarded as an opportunity to initiate a progression along certain lines in the life of the child. For some it was an event which not only guaranteed spiritual and physical well-being but also an opportunity to secure in the infant a wide variety of desirable dispositions which would manifest themselves later in life. Mrs Cash, for example, was told that at her baptism her grandfather, a brewer and publican in the parish of St Edmund's, 'rubbed my lips with whiskey [...] and said, "sensible women always appreciate good whiskey", so I've never been opposed to alcohol! [laughs]'.[123]

The transitional state of the unbaptised infant was such that it was sometimes unwelcome at the homes of relatives.[124] Mrs Carter, a resident of the Wren's Nest Estate who had a son in the early 1960s, recalled:

> They always believed in having the children Christened, like, years gone by. Because I remember when I had our Billy. I hadn't had him Christened and I took him up to my mother's on Saturday, as I was having him Christened on the Sunday, at St Christopher's. And her said, 'Oh', her says, 'don't get bringing the babby in 'ere' [...] I says 'Why?'. And her says 'It's bad luck'. Because they believed in taking - when you had a young baby, they always believed in having it Christened first and then taking it in the 'ouse. Her don't believe in taking them in the house until they'd been Christened.[125]

More common, however, was the belief that it was unlucky for mothers of new-born children to enter another person's house until she had been 'churched' (received a blessing at church) which remained strong amongst working-class women well beyond the War. The origins of the practice lay in the pre-Reformation Catholic church and its survival within the Church of England was guaranteed by its incorporation in the Elizabethan Prayer Book.[126] Its

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121 RPMSI, D6.
122 RPMSI, D10.
123 RPMSI, D5.
124 Cf. Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, p. 116.
125 RPMSI, D4.
126 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 42-3 and 68-9.

survival into the modern period has been well documented by a number of historians through the nineteenth century and into the late twentieth century.[127]

Locally, the practice of churching of mothers of new-born infants remained widespread throughout the period 1914-1965. It retained its multi-faceted symbolic power for the generation of mothers who bore children between the wars and whose kinship-dominated environment served to sustain and reinforce such beliefs. Churching was regarded as an appropriate act of thanksgiving for a safe delivery and a healthy child, and was encouraged as such by the local Anglican clergy, who provided times for churching services.[128] More prominent, however, were the folk beliefs in the potential of the new mother to bring bad luck to any home which she visited before being churched, and in the need for the new mother to experience spiritual cleansing.[129] For those who held them such beliefs were part of a single discourse of popular religiosity:[130] the Christian act of thanksgiving and the folk belief in warding off ill-luck were regarded as complementary aspects of a single ritual attached to the rite of passage of birth. The prevalence of this seemingly syncretic understanding of the meaning of churching is indicated not only by the testimony of interviewees, but also by the frustrated comments of clergy who regarded the folk and the orthodox Christian elements of the practice as discrete and incompatible. Locally, popular beliefs about churching elicited little comment from clergy during the early years of the period, though the Reverend David Llewellyn, curate at St Christopher's church on the Wren's Nest, recalled the 'odd notion' of women who came to ask to be churched at a moment's notice because they wanted to go to a

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127 For the nineteenth century, see, for example, Bartlett, 'Churches in Bermondsey', p. 185; Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 169-72 and *idem.*, 'Urban Popular Religion and Rites of Passage', in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930* (1995), pp.216-36 (pp. 220 and 226). For the twentieth century, M-O A: TC Religion, 3/D, n.d..; Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford, 1995), p. 99; Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, pp. 115, 119 and 121-24. Clark concludes that in the context of increased medical supervision and hospital births, beliefs about churching had been significantly eroded by the time of his observation.

128 e.g. churching services were advertised in *Parish Magazine of St Peter's Upper Gornal*, January/February 1946, *St James, Lower Gornal Parish Magazine*, June 1914 and in the first issue of the *Parish Magazine of St Francis*, January 1932.

129 e.g. RPMSI, G7 and G15.

130 The interpretation here corresponds with, and is indebted to, that of Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 169-72.

party and needed to be cleaned from the impurity of childbirth.[131] By the 1960s some local clergy were condemning the 'superstitious' belief attaching to a dignified and appropriate act of thanksgiving. In January 1961, for example, the Reverend Peter Baker, incumbent of St Luke's Church, Dudley, urged fathers to join their wives in services of thanksgiving for new births at a set time on Friday evenings, and added with apparent frustration:

> I do not think it is right that a woman, the first day she is up, should come to Church, this is merely a sop to superstition and the Church should not be a party to it [...] Mothers you will NOT be unlucky (you are more likely to get all sorts of things if you come out before you are fit). The roof will NOT fall in, if your shadow crosses someone else's doorstep. You are NOT impure. You CAN go out and about quite normally if you have not been Churched within the shortest possible time after your confinement. There is nothing magic about this beautiful little service [...] so come when you are fit and are able to join fully in thanking God for YOUR safety after your baby has been born.[132]

In 1964, a curate from St Francis's and St Christopher's on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates contributed to the parish magazine an article on superstition. Amongst several superstitions which the Reverend J.W. Thorpe believed to be prevalent in the parish, those associated with the birth of new baby were singled out for the most severe condemnation and for Thorpe there was 'none worse than the ideas which surround the Churching of Women'. The proper reason, he argued, is to give thanks for a safe deliverance but, he observed, 'weird ideas of uncleanliness are rife' and it was widely considered to be courting bad luck to enter the house of friends or family before being churched, 'Old Wives' tales', he added 'that need to be stamped out'. Explicitly stating a distinction between 'religion' and 'superstition', the article concludes 'superstition is nowhere more dangerous than where it attaches itself to religion'.[133]

The practice was equally common in the Gornal villages, amongst Anglicans and Nonconformists. Mr Hudson, born in Cheshire, came to live in Gornal after the War and was surprised by the universality of the practice of churching in the villages: 'they would not go anywhere until they had been to church. That was a tradition you see [...] I came from

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131 Private correspondence from David Llewellyn (Curate at St Christopher's, 1949-50) to the author, 16 January 1997 (letter in possession of the author).

132 *Parish Magazine of St Luke*, January 1961.

133 *St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher's Church*, August 1964. The clergy were not always innocent of encouraging a belief that women needed cleansing after childbirth. Mrs Cash, a lifelong attender at St Edmund's Dudley, recalled that after the birth of her son in 1951 Father Ferley at St Edmund's told her that she could not take communion until she had been churched since she remained, until such a time, unclean (RPMSI, D5).

somewhere where it didn't happen'.[134] Mr Latham, a lifelong Methodist from Lower Gornal, recalled the demands made by new mothers on Ike Taylor, a miner and prominent member of Lake Street Methodist chapel in the years before the Second World War:

> if a woman had a baby [...] the mother would come and say 'Mr Taylor will you come and pray for me?' And he'd go and open the church and take her into church and pray for her. She'd been churched then [...] she could go out shopping [...] And they probably never even come into the church. But they would be afraid to go doing the shopping and doing the work until they'd been churched.[135]

The practice, he recalled, extended well into the post-war years. Father John Butler, priest at St Peter's Upper Gornal during the early 1960s recalled that 'churching was still seen as an almost purificatory ceremony'.[136] Reverend Timms, incumbent of St James's Lower Gornal during the 1950s, declared that the clergy became exasperated by the 'superstition that is so often associated with it', emphasising the need to make a thanksgiving, as stated in the Book of Common Prayer. He added:

> It is indeed a wicked superstition when a young mother is forbidden to step over the threshold of a neighbour's door before she has been for the Churching, in case evil should befall them.[137]

Reverend Perry Smith, Methodist minister for the Gornal section between 1956 and 1961 remembers that the mothers and grandmothers of new mothers would not admit them to their houses until they had been 'prayed for', and that many new mothers knocked at the Manse door to request an immediate service.[138] So entrenched was the belief that churching was an integral part of the process of childbirth that, as local ministers discovered, some new mothers expected any costs for its provision to be covered by the NHS.[139]

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[134] RPMSI, G17; cf. RPMSI, G1.

[135] RPMSI, G21.

[136] Private correspondence from John Butler to the author, January 1997 (letter in possession of the author).

[137] *DH*, 19 September 1953.

[138] Private correspondence from Perry Smith to the author, 9 October 1996 (letter in possession of the author).

[139] John Thorpe, curate at St Christopher's, Wren's Nest Estate, overheard a conversation between two young mothers, one of whom asked the other how much the service of churching costed, prompting the reply that "'it's the last thing you get on the National Health'", whilst a Birmingham priest, on offering the alms bag at the end of a churching service was met with astonishment and the reply, "'I thought this was paid for by the National Health Service'" (*Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, June 1965; *Parish Magazine of St Edmund's*, May 1952).

All female interviewees recalled the multiple meanings attributed to the practice of churching amongst regular and irregular churchgoers of all denominations during the inter-war years and well into the post-war years. Mrs Downing, for example, who attended Sunday school at St Michael's church Tividale (an Anglo-Catholic church) and as an adult has periodically attended St James's church, Eve Hill claimed the belief was universal and survives, at least among some, to the present:

> You didn't go to anybody else's house until you'd been to church. That was a strong belief with everybody. We still have it now. When I've been doing the flowers in church we've had couples come and I've had to read a little bit for them, thanking God for the baby [...] It was bad luck, really not to go to church.[140]

Mrs Tomlins, born in Coseley in 1930, attended a Wesleyan Sunday school but did not attend church as an adult. She recalled:

> When a mother had a child [...] you couldn't go in anybody else's house until you'd been churched. And it was supposed to be bad luck if you went in anybody else's house before you'd been to church after you'd had the baby [...] everybody used to be like that, everyone I knew. If you went to mother's or aunt's a fortnight after you'd had the baby you had to stand outside because it was bad luck until you'd been to church [...] A lot of people go to church before they have the baby christened, so they can get about and do their shopping and do what they'n got to do.[141]

The widespread expectation that a new mother would wish to visit a church before going anywhere else was sometimes expressed in surprising ways. Mrs Cash, a lifelong regular worshipper at St Edmund's church, had her first son in 1951:

> When I had John, on the way back from the nursing home the taxi stopped at St James's church on the way down from the Rosemary Ednam and I said, "No, I'm not going in there. I'm going to my own church. But not today".[142]

Such beliefs were more usually enforced through their transmission through generations, usually from mother to daughter. Mrs Childs, born in 1915 and a lifelong Gornal Methodist, inherited from her mother a belief that one had to go to church at the first opportunity in order to be cleansed from sin.[143] Mrs Hill, who grew up on the Priory Estate with her mother and continued to live with her parents for some years after her marriage, had four children between

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[140] RPMSI, D8.
[141] RPMSI, G29.
[142] RPMSI, D5.
[143] RPMSI, G7.

1951 and 1963. On each occasion she was churched. Asked whether she would have felt that it could be unlucky not to do so, she replied:

> Yes, it would. It would have seemed awful to me. But I was lucky I had all my children at home in my own house. The first two in my mother's house and the other two in my own. It would have been awful to go into somebody else's house before going in to church [...]
>
> Q. Was it from mum that you learnt these traditions?
> Oh yes [...] And my grandparents as well, especially my mother's family. [144]

Men, however, were often unaware of the practice of churching or, at best, recalled it less readily than female interviewees. Mr Lewis's mother lived with him and his wife until her death and she it was who insisted on the observance of the ritual of churching when Mr Lewis and his wife had a son:

> You use a phrase that I didn't know, 'churching'. Oh yeah, mom. I remember mom used to tell us. Actually my wife, when my son was born my mom insisted that she had to go to church to be prayed for [...] You couldn't go into that house until the mother had been prayed for. Yes that was a strong tradition.[145]

An inclination towards belief in luck sometimes existed independently of any theistic beliefs. Mrs Smart, a lifelong resident of the Priory Estate, never attended church after her teenage years, and as a young adult rejected belief in God or an afterlife. She had eight children between 1952 and 1965, and on the first four occasions (between 1952 and 1960) she was churched and had the children christened, inclining to the belief that it would be unlucky not to do so, but then added that she observed the custom mostly in response to local expectations and that one would not have been admitted to anybody's house without doing so.[146]

It was widely believed that luck could be manipulated in a variety of ways, beyond the avoidance or observance of certain ritual activities. A number of interviewees, or their parents, owned other lucky charms, unrelated to Christian symbolism, in the efficacy of which they firmly believed. Horse-shoes, white elephants, rabbits' feet and elfen figures were amongst the most commonly mentioned objects. There is little evidence of local beliefs in the healing or protective powers of such lucky charms during the period, although such beliefs had apparently been widespread locally during the nineteenth century and, in London, into the twentieth

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144 RPMSI, D14.
145 RPMSI, D21.
146 RPMSI, D25.

century.[147] Only in the context of the bomber crews of the Second World War was mention made of such protective functions. Mr Sankey, a mechanic for the RAF during World War II, was in regular contact with bomber crews:

> certain pilots would only fly at certain dates of the week. They wouldn't go on the 13th for a start. But they were forced to. And I know some pilots, if they'd got a certain scarf round their necks, that was their guarantee to go and come back.[148]

More frequently the lucky charm secured material good fortune, confirming the distinction between the 'lucky' and the 'miraculous' identified above.[149] Mrs Richards' mother kept a little elf charm in her purse and always took it out and put it on the table when she went to bingo.[150] Mr and Mrs Young, Wren's Nest Estate residents who rarely attended church as adults, had both owned lucky charms for many years. Mrs Young still kept a small brass horse-shoe in her purse, carefully transferring it every time she changed her purse, whilst Mr Young obtained a 'Joan the Wad' elf charm during the 1940s:

> A little lucky charm, and I always seemed to be lucky with it [...] I had that for years [...] I got it for luck and I always believed in luck. And of course I lost it one day in the village. I put my hand in me pocket and it had gone, I'd dropped it. And you seem to think, 'Oh me lucky charm's gone', and you seem to think that, 'Oh I shan't have any luck'. And things didn't go as well because I didn't pick money up. I used to come back, walking along the path and I could bend down and pick money up even if it was in the grass, anywhere. I don't think there was a day that I went without finding something [...] But someone would pick it up and they would have a bit of luck.[151]

Mrs Griffiths owned another popular lucky charm - the white elephant[152] - which, kept in her purse was, like the string she goes on to describe, apparently for the purposes of securing financial security:

> For years and years I kept a little white elephant [...] It used to be always in my purse. And I do believe in this, somewhere along the line somebody gave me a purse and somebody gave me a piece of string tied in a knot, and you're never without some source of income. After I

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147 Jon Raven, *Black Country & Staffordshire Stories, Customs, Superstitions, Tales, Legends & Folklore* (Wolverhampton, 1986), pp. 37-42; Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 139-44.

148 RPMSI, G2. Bob Bushaway has argued that bomber crews' regular exposure to the threat of death during World War II generated similar beliefs to those of soldiers on the Western Front during World War I (Bob Bushaway, 'Popular Belief on the Western Front', paper given to the Birmingham University religious history seminar series, 6 May 1997).

149 cf. Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', p. 124.

150 RPMSI, D23.

151 RPMSI, D30.

152 cf. Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', p. 128.

> was married I should think. The white elephant [...] if I'm going on a long journey that goes with me. Not just in the car, but if I'm going abroad it goes with me.[153]

Mrs Sankey, who moved from Stafford to Gornal following her marriage, did not own a lucky charm but recalled that her mother had done so:

> My mother always kept a little black cat in her purse, she always kept that in her purse. She always used to say, when she'd got that in her purse she was never short of money. I always remember that.[154]

A belief in the lucky qualities of abnormal forms of natural objects was mentioned by a small number of interviewees. Mr Beddoe, a Sunday scholar at Lake Street chapel in the 1920s and 30s but rarely an attender at church or chapel as an adult, had a 40-year old 4-leafed clover which he inherited from his wife on her death.[155] Again, the purpose of the clover leaf seems to have been to secure financial good fortune.

Such charms were clearly sanctioned by traditions passed on orally through generations, more often than not through the female line. Others were encouraged and sustained by commercial means. Mr Young and Mrs Grundy, for example, both obtained their elfen 'Joan the Wad' charms by responding to newspaper advertisements. Charms which drew on Christian tradition and symbolism were also commercially available, and designed for specific purposes. Mr Sankey, for example, had for years carried a St Christopher key-ring given to him as a gift with a verse inscribed on it invoking a blessing for the car-driving owner.[156] It seems that some Christian symbols were manufactured and sold with the explicit purpose of providing consumers with overtly Christian alternatives to non-Christian and 'magical' charms. Mrs Brooks, a Zoar Methodist Sunday scholar who had only returned to a regular involvement with chapel in her old age, carried in her purse for over thirty years a small cross given to her by a

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153 RPMSI, D10.

154 RPMSI, G2.

155 RPMSI, G4. Cf. RPMSI, D25.

156 RPMSI, G2. Cf. charms associated with driving cars mentioned in Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 137-38.

friend, a zealous church-goer and Bible-reader.[157] The cross was inscribed with a verse, the opening of which disassociates the object from beliefs in magical charms:

> I carry a cross in my pocket as a simple reminder to me of the fact that I'm a Christian no matter where I be. This little cross is not magic, nor is it a good luck charm, it isn't meant to protect me from every physical harm. It's not for identification for all the world to see, it's simply an understanding between my saviour and me.[158]

In the activities and person of the gypsy, folk beliefs and a commercial supply of charms were combined. According to the Reverend Paul Tongue, curate at St Edmund's Dudley and then at St Andrew's Mission church, the Straits Lower Gornal, during the 1960s, gypsy folklore was, and remains, 'rife' locally.[159] Local tradition attributed particular power to gypsies, who were regarded by some with a degree of fear. Mr Lewis's mother, who attended Vicar Street Methodist chapel when she lived in Gad's Lane, central Dudley, before moving to the Wren's Nest Estate and his wife who originally came from Ruiton, both feared the gypsy hawkers who came to the door:

> My mother, if she went to the door not knowing that it was a gypsy she would always buy something. Because they used to frighten people by saying they would bring bad luck if you didn't buy something [... these were] traditions handed down from grandparents.[160]

Mrs Young, a Wren's Nest Estate resident who has rarely attended church as an adult, has always experienced similar fear of gypsy callers:

> I tell you what I don't like, when a gypsy comes to your door [...] They frighten me [...] I think sometimes they might put a curse on you.[161]

Good luck could be secured and bad luck avoided in a myriad of other ways. A web of folk superstitions was incorporated within a local popular culture in Dudley and the Gornals which extended throughout the constituencies of regular and irregular church- and chapel-goers.

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157 RPMSI, G2. The friend apparently at one time suffered from mental ill-health, being treated for what Mrs Brooks called 'religious mania'; Richard Hoggart notes the popularity of this expression amongst the working class to denote religious fanaticism and to imply disapproval (*The Uses of Literacy*, p. 116).

158 RPMSI, G2.

159 Interview with the author.

160 RPMSI, D21.

161 RPMSI, D30.

Apparently trivial actions could generate concern.[162] Certain actions were prescribed and others avoided in order to secure good luck and fend off misfortune. Interviewees recalled how particular activities, harmless in themselves, were scrupulously avoided and strictly prohibited in their parents' and, often to a lesser extent, their own homes. Many such superstitions were found within families of various denominations and varying levels of commitment to church- and chapel-going.

Williams notes that the avoidance of a variety of actions such as putting shoes on a table, crossing knives and spilling salt, were common to Southwark and many other parts of the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[163] Mass-Observation researchers in the 1940s and 1950s similarly found a wide range of superstitions amongst their interviewees and respondents,[164] whilst David Clark uncovered a rich seam of folk beliefs in the fishing village of Staithes in the 1960s.[165] In the Black Country, local folklorists have noted the survival of similar practices and beliefs into the late twentieth century.[166]

Many superstitions concerned the transgression of the norms of domestic order, or the transgression of the boundaries of outdoors and indoors. Putting shoes on the table, for example, could produce a violent response. [167] Mr Latham's mother, a regular at Himley Road Methodist chapel until driven away by a chapel feud, was adamant on the matter:

> You could never put your shoes on the table, if ever you did that you would have your ears clipped.[168]

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[162] The following account of local superstitions closely echoes the findings of Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp.119-26, in Southwark, though Williams locates such beliefs within a popular culture distinct from that of the culture of the churches and their committed adherents.

[163] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 119-21.

[164] M-O A: FR975, 'Report on Superstition', 24 November 1941; FR1612, 'Faith and Fear in Postwar Britain', 15 February 1943; FR2112, 'Superstition', 7 June 1944; FR2461A,'Superstition', February 1947.

[165] Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, pp. 145-60.

[166] Raven, *Black Country & Staffordshire Stories*, pp. 43-56.

[167] e.g. RPMSI, D1, D4, D8, D10, D14, D17, D21, D26, D30, G2, G7, G20, G21, G25, G26. An article in a local history newspaper claimed that the reason many Midlanders had an aversion to putting a box with old shoes on a table was that some coalmasters (including the Earl of Dudley) provided victims of fatal coal accidents with new shoes and a suit for a decent burial, and the coffin was always placed on the table in the home of the deceased for several days (*BCB*, April 1991). Superstitions relating to shoes, however, have a long pedigree (see, for example, W.C. Hazlitt, *Dictionary of Faiths & Folklore: Beliefs, Superstitions and Popular Customs* (1995)) and this particular prohibition extends well beyond the confines of the coalfields, as Williams has shown.

[168] RPMSI, G21.

Mr Latham himself scoffed at such superstitions but observed the custom nevertheless. Mrs Griffiths, who rarely attended church or chapel after her Sunday schooling at 'Wesley' chapel in Wolverhampton Street, learnt the same rule from her grandparents, occasional chapel-goers who brought her up, and internalised it:

> Oh, I won't do that now. I'm worried sick, oh now that is a superstition. Oh yes. I don't know why [...] Or sit on, if you sat on the table they used to say there was going to be a row in the house. In fact me grandma had a stick and she used to crack you one if you did anything like that.[169]

Mrs Scott, brought up on the Priory Estate, moved to Gornal on marriage and was, for some years as a young adult, a fairly regular attender at St James's, though later she only occasionally attended. She remains concerned by any transgression of the prohibition on shoes on tables:

> Oooh yes! Definitely, putting new shoes on the table, that is bad luck. Don't dare put them on my table! Oh yes, definitely. My mother would throw them off.

Q. Would you?
Yes, I don't like new shoes on the table. If they [her grandchildren] come - 'Don't put them on the table, take them off!'.[170]

Mrs Hill, brought up on the Priory Estate and a regular Methodist for most of her life, was never allowed by her parents to put shoes on the table and still avoids doing so. But of equal concern is the opening of umbrellas inside the home:

> My son had an umbrella and bought someone one for Christmas and he opened it in here and I said, 'Oh, don't open that in here!' He said, 'Oh, I can hear Nan talking'. You know, she wouldn't let me do anything like that. [171]

Equally common and often mentioned together, were concerns with walking under ladders, crossing on stairs, crossing knives, dropping cutlery or other objects, breaking mirrors, hearing thunderstorms, spilling salt and throwing bread into the fire.[172] The avoidance of walking under ladders or crossing on stairs remains familiar and was one common superstition

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169 RPMSI, D10.

170 RPMSI, G26.

171 RPMSI, D14. cf. RPMSI, D8; *BCB*, August 1989 (letter from A. Hyde); Raven, *Black Country and Staffordshire Stories*, p. 55.

172 RPMSI, D4, D6, D8, D14, G8, G15, G7, G29. Cf. *BCB*, Christmas 1972 and Raven, *Black Country and Staffordshire Stories*, p. 55.

in Dudley and the Gornals throughout the period.[173] Less familiar today, but held with great conviction earlier in the century, was the belief that it was unlucky for knives to be crossed. Mr Beddoe's mother, an occasional Catholic, was insistent on the avoidance of crossing knives, and took pains to avoid accidentally doing so. As Mr Beddoe recalled:

> You daren't cross knives if Mum was around [...] If ever she was putting knives and forks out on the table she would always have the knives in one hand and forks in the other and as she put them out she would make sure that there was no way in which they were going to cross.[174]

Some interviewees have retained lifelong habits relating to such superstitions. Mr and Mrs Hood, lifelong Ruiton Congregationalists, Mrs Kenny, an occasional Upper Gornal Anglican and Mr and Mrs Carter, Wren's Nest Estate residents with little involvement in church since childhood, have all always been careful to avoid crossing knives. As the Carters explained,

Mrs When I'm washing up and I've got two knives with me washing up in the bowl I always make sure as one's, like, underneath and the other's, like, on another plate sort of thing. I wouldn't put...
Mr Wouldn't cross them!
Mrs When I wipe them I always make sure as, you know, I wipe them separate. You don't cross them.[175]

Others recalled such beliefs as a feature of their parents' beliefs. Mrs Childs, a lifelong Methodist with lapsed Methodist parents, recalled that there were 'so many little things as we weren't allowed to do', adding that crossing knives was considered 'the unluckiest thing out'.[176] Mrs Causer, a Priory Estate resident, actively involved in St Francis's church for the past thirty years, now dismisses such beliefs as 'tosh', but acknowledged that she picked them up from her mother and carried them into her young adulthood:

> Throwing salt over your shoulder [...] crossing knives. That's a throwback from my mum, you know, that is, all that, putting your knives away when there's a thunderstorm and all that sort of thing.[177]

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[173] RPMSI, G29, D10, D13, D16, D26, G8, G25, G6.
[174] RPMSI, G4.
[175] RPMSI, D4.
[176] RPMSI, G7.
[177] RPMSI, D6. The declining authority of such beliefs is explored in chapter 7.

Several other interviewees recalled the practice of covering up both cutlery and mirrors in the event of a thunderstorm.[178] Dropping cutlery was also regarded as an omen. Mrs Hill's mother, a Priory Estate resident, was adamant on this point:

> If you dropped a knife it was a male visitor, if a fork, a female visitor, if you dropped a spoon it was a child. That was definite and it often came true, funnily enough.[179]

To pick up a dropped glove or to thank somebody else for doing so, on the other hand, was to court bad luck. Mrs Griffiths learnt the belief from her grandmother:

> If I drop a glove I will not pick it up. I'll kick it all round the house, it worries me. If I'm on my own and I've dropped it and I've been outside shopping, I've had to pick it up, I haven't liked doing it. And I know that week I'm going to hear bad news, and it has happened [...] I say to anybody who picks it up 'And I'm not thanking you for it' [...] If you say thank you it is bad luck. You may as well pick the glove up.[180]

Superstitions relating to salt were also common. Mass-Observation researchers found the practice of throwing salt over one's shoulder after spilling salt to be the most commonly observed superstitious ritual.[181] The practice was also, according to oral evidence, common in Gornal and Dudley amongst church and chapel families, as well as those on the margins of institutional religion.[182] It was also believed by some, like Mr and Mrs Carter and their neighbour, to be unlucky to borrow salt, or to accept thanks for lending it.[183] To throw bread into the fire was considered unlucky, the fire seemingly symbolising the home of the devil. Mr and Mrs Carter and Mrs Richards, all residents of the Wren's Nest Estate for most or all of their lives, recalled the injunction of their parents to 'feed the birds and clam the devil', and still avoid throwing away bread although their homes no longer contain open fires.[184]

Certain colours, or combinations of colours, were avoided. The belief that to put red and white flowers together in a vase was to court disaster was mocked in St Francis's parish

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178 RPMSI, D23, G12, G26.

179 RPMSI, D14. Also RPMSI, G12 and G29. Cf. Raven, *Black Country and Staffordshire Stories*, p. 58.

180 RPMSI, D10. Cf. M-O A: FR975, 'Report on Superstition', 24 November 1941 and FR2112, 'Superstition', 7 June 1944; Raven, *Black Country and Staffordshire Stories*, p. 55.

181 M-O A: FR2461A, 'Superstition', February 1947 and FR975, 'Report on Superstition', 24 November 1941, Part B, p. 2.

182 RPMSI, G26, D4, D21, D25, D30, G8, G21.

183 RPMSI, D4.

184 RPMSI, D4; RPMSI, D23.

magazine by the curate, John Thorpe, in 1964.[185] Mrs Beale, Mrs Kenny, Mrs Cash, Mr Williams, Mrs Causer, Mrs Gould and Miss Haywood had all encountered the belief - usually in the context of illness and hospitals or of bereavement - though no interviewee continued to hold it with any great conviction.[186] Several interviewees did, however, continue to feel a deep-seated fear of the colour green, a superstition which seems to have been more effectively transmitted through generations within families,[187] though others pointedly stated that, in contrast to their parents or other older relatives, they loved green.[188] Mrs Griffiths recalled the absence of any green in her grandparents' house (where she was brought up) in Wolverhampton Street, Dudley, and her grandmother's horror when the young Mrs Griffiths bought herself a pair of green shoes.[189] Mrs Tomlins, a non-church-goer from Lower Gornal, retained the strongest distrust of the colour green:

> I ain't fond of green. I've got a green jumper upstairs and I've only worn it once and I hate that green jumper. I'm superstitious over that, and it's all ridiculous. It's like a very, very dark, to me it's like a deathly green, horrible thing. And I don't know whether it was what makes me like that 'cos when I carried my second child I had a green loose coat [...] and that green coat, after I had that child [stillborn] I never wore it after. It's only 'cos I've heard somebody else say 'Oh green is ever so unlucky, green is ever so unlucky' [...] And I remember thinking, 'Oh I shall never, ever have a green coat, not as long as ever I live anymore'.[190]

The superstition about green was not confined to women, clothing and the familiar domestic sphere, but extended into the male domain of modern private transport. Mr Lewis stated:

> Some people say it's bad luck to have a green car. I know a couple of chaps who won't have a green car at the best of times, they say it's bad luck. Don't they say green follows black? [Wife intervenes: 'Black follows green'] Black follows green, that's right. If you have a green car, then automatically, you have a death in the family and black follows it.[191]

Some prescribed rituals for the avoidance of bad luck related to the care and welfare of infants. Mrs Cash recalled her grandmother's injunction to stand on a chair as soon as she returned home with her new daughter, in order that the child ascended heavenwards.[192] Mrs

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185 *St Francis Parish Magazine*, August 1964.
186 RPMSI, G5, G20, D5, D29, D6, D13, D17.
187 RPMSI, D23, D8, G29.
188 RPMSI, D16, G8, G12.
189 RPMSI, D10.
190 RPMSI, G29.
191 RPMSI, D21.
192 RPMSI, D5.

Young, like her mother, firmly believed that it was very bad luck to see a child in the mirror before it had its first tooth.[193] And infants' nails had to be chewed rather than cut, as Mrs Griffiths discovered with some surprise from her mother when she had her son:

> I remember saying, 'Oh, he's scratched his face'. And I remember her saying, 'Yes they need shortening'. And I said, 'I haven't got any small scissors'. And [screams] 'Oh, you don't cut the nails. You have to bite them'. And I said 'Don't be ridiculous'. And she said 'If you don't do it, I will' [...] And do you know, she did.[194]

It was also commonly believed that it was unlucky to cut children's or adults' nails (and sometimes hair) on certain days of the week (usually Friday and/or Sunday).[195]

More common, however, were beliefs in the need to observe, or avoid, certain activities on certain days of the year. Most commonly mentioned was the custom of avoiding throwing away washing water on Good Friday. Many of the interviewees who recalled the custom as one they (if women), for a time, and their mothers observed, admitted to some perplexity as to its significance, beyond a belief that non-observance was believed to be unlucky.[196] According to Mrs Hill's mother, however, to throw soapy water away on Good Friday was to drain the blood from Christ's body, whilst Mrs Healey, a Lower Gornal Anglican believed it was 'something to do with washing the Lord's feet'.[197] In established traditional neighbourhoods, like the terraced streets of Ruiton, the observance of the ritual was communally enforced with considerable vigour. Mr Bailey's family came from Stoke to Ruiton in the mid-1920s and encountered the belief for the first time. Mr Bailey, religiously agnostic, vividly recalled the local reaction to his mother's ignorance of the Good Friday custom:

> Good Friday they would never throw soap suds down the drain. That was one of the things [laughs] We went to live in this house along Hermit Street, and me mother threw some water down the drain on Good Friday and the bloody street was up on her [laughs]! But me mother didn't know what they were on about [...] Because your house, all the doors opened onto the pavement [...] and me mother comes out with this bowl of water and throws it down the drain and they all went mad, didn't they?[198]

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[193] RPMSI, D30.
[194] RPMSI, D10. Also RPMSI, G2.
[195] RPMSI, G6, G7, G20 and G29.
[196] RPMSI, D10, G8, D26, D21, D30, G15, G2 and G29.
[197] RPMSI, D14 and G12.
[198] RPMSI, G1.

Many families saw in the New Year at home, observing a strict ritual. The term 'first-footing' was not volunteered by interviewees - it was simply 'loosing the New Year in' - but the ritual observed was very similar to that described by Clark as a feature of the annual cycle of life in Staithes.[199] The custom consisted of an adult male, usually but not always the father of the household, going outside before midnight, entering through the front door, often carrying a piece of coal and sometimes a glass of water, stoking the hearth, invoking a blessing on the household, passing through the house and exiting by the back door, symbolically bringing the New Year in and taking the old out.[200] Some insisted that the man should be dark-haired, and that a light-haired man was bad luck.[201] Once the first-footing was finished, doors were frequently left open to neighbours to visit for communal festivities. As Mrs Richards of the Wren's Nest Estate recalled:

> They said the first through the front door loosed the New Year in. No, that was no good in our house, somebody had *got* to loose the New Year in [i.e. not left to chance] and properly, you know coming in the front, poke the fire and go out through the back. That was it. 'I've come to loose the old year out and the new year in and God bless the Master and Mistress of this House' [...] our dad liked a stranger to do it. Well not a stranger but somebody who lived close by. When we were kids that's all you could hear on New Year's Eve, people loosing the New Year in.[202]

The same scene was played out in the Gornal villages, and in some families until very recently, as Mr Tranter described:

> You used to do that after the stroke of 12. A minute into the New Year and take some coal with you, which we had then, coal fires, you'd carry a piece of coal with you as you done it. And you used to see that up and down the street. You'd see the doors going open and that [...] We used to open the front door, go through the back door, round the house. Take the old year out of the house with you, and bring the New Year in.[203]

Luck could not always be manipulated, but signs of one's fate were there for those who knew how to read them. In everyday life, good and bad omens were legion. Cracked mirrors, falling pictures and portraits, rooks, magpies, crows, sparrows (in the house), and dogs howling were all dreaded. Mr Lewis's mother, who lived in Gads Lane in central Dudley before moving to the Wren's Nest Estate, held many of these beliefs:

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199 cf. Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, pp. 91-5.
200 RPMSI, G29, D14 and D23.
201 RPMSI, D23, G2 and G12.
202 RPMSI, D23.
203 RPMSI, G28.

> Sometimes a picture would fall off the wall and mom would say someone's going to hear some bad news, it was a bad omen, not necessarily in the family and sometimes it would happen that way - so-and-so died. The same if a bird came into the house. Mom used to go petrified. If a sparrow came in, she would go berserk, she was absolutely petrified and we had to drive it out. And if a crow landed on the roof she would turn around and say that's a bad omen. And they always said it happened in threes.[204]

The still familiar belief that cracked mirrors brought seven years bad luck was common throughout the period,[205] and taken seriously enough to provoke a blow from a parent to a mocking child.[206] A picture falling from the wall or slipping off the level was a more specific omen of an impending death, an omen which, several interviewees recalled, often proved all too true.[207] During the Second World War, when husbands and sons were absent, such beliefs took on an added significance. Mrs Childs of Upper Gornal recalled a local Methodist family fearing the worst when a portrait of their absent son fell from the wall:

> I knew of people. One up Pale Street, her son was in the War and his photo dropped and smashed. 'Whatever's the matter with it? He's been wounded.' The day when it fell down he'd been wounded [...] doom they used to say, that's a doom sign.[208]

Similarly, Mrs Hill recalled the common belief in the ominous significance of the falling picture, as well as a more idiosyncratic belief of her mother's:

> And of course with a picture falling down. Nine times out of ten it was people at war then. But I remember just before my grand-dad died the picture fell down in our front room, and me mother said, 'Oh dear!' Mind you he was in his nineties but me mother felt it was a bad sign. And another thing, if my mother heard a cricket and it sounded as though it was in the house, or just outside the house it was a sign of a death of somebody going to die.[209]

A more common fear than the cricket was the presence of birds in the house. Starlings, magpies and, in particular, sparrows were feared.[210] Mrs Richards and Mrs Carter of the Wren's Nest Estate, for example, still fear the appearance of a sparrow inside the house. But the appearance and sounds of rooks and crows, and of dogs howling, was ominous regardless of their

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[204] RPMSI, D21.
[205] RPMSI, D4, G21, G15, G26, G2 and G28.
[206] RPMSI, G7.
[207] RPMSI, D10, D21, G26, D1, D4, D17, D18, D14, D23, D30, G6, G8, G12 and G2.
[208] RPMSI, G7.
[209] RPMSI, D14.
[210] RPMSI, D4, D23, G2 and G28.

environment, often heralding death, though the meaning was sometimes dependent upon the number present.[211] As Mrs Carter of the Wren's Nest Estate explained:

> Ahh, crows, I don't like the crows. Crows, yes, bad luck, a sign of death, somebody dying. And I believe in that now [...] When we used to go into the hop country there used to be a lot in the fields and they used to say one crow for sorrow another for death or something like that and it used to give me the creeps [...] but I've found there is some truth in that [...] Like, we lost our two neighbours next door, and I was talking to her one day and two come over and her said 'Oh I canna bear those things'. I says 'No nor me' [...] They dain' happen straight away after we'd seen them but one or two weeks later, 'Oh so-and-so's died'. So I think there is, I don't like to hear them anyway and nor when there's a dog howling. They say that's a sign of a death, if you hear a dog, I don't like that neither. [212]

Some omens were reportedly held with great conviction by earlier generations, though accounts were few amongst interviewees. Mrs Tomlins of Lower Gornal, for example, recalled a fear of diamond patterns in cloth:

> Oh, if there was a diamond in the table-cloth. Or if you put your clean sheets on your bed years ago, if there was a diamond in it, the old'uns used to say, that's a sign of death [...] And when you put a table-cloth on years ago when everybody had them, and I've heard her say, me mother [...and] me grandmother, 'Oh there's a diamond in it, I don't like that table-cloth at all, you know'.[213]

Not all omens were so unequivocally gloomy. The black cat, for example, was regarded as a good sign by some, and a bad sign by others.[214] A film of soot on the fire-grate heralded the imminent arrival of a stranger.[215] Mrs Griffiths recalled how

> they were fine, like paper clinging to the bars and granny used to say, 'We're going to have a visitor'. And more often than not we did have a visitor, I don't know why [...] she [grandmother] wouldn't let you knock it off. She used to sit there and watch this blimming thing [...] And we would get a visitor. It might only have been someone up the road who would probably have come anyway, but somebody else different did come into the house during that day.[216]

Certain rituals could reverse some bad luck omens. Seeing a new moon through glass was an omen of bad luck, but turning a sixpence immediately afterwards offered the hope of material good fortune.[217]

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[211] RPMSI, D1, D23, G4, G25, G12, D8, D14, D26 and D28.
[212] RPMSI, D4. Cf. a similar account in RPMSI, D30 (Mrs Young).
[213] RPMSI, G29.
[214] RPMSI, D26 and G29.
[215] RPMSI, D8, D21, D17, D28, D26, G1, G29, G7, G12, G21 and G26.
[216] RPMSI, D10.
[217] RPMSI, D8, D17, D21, D23, D26, D30, G21 and G26.

Mothers or grandmothers, whose domestic role gave them authority in the home, were usually the enforcers of rules relating to superstitious beliefs. The great majority of interviewees ascribed to their mothers the firmest beliefs in, and insistence on the observance of, such customs and attributed their own beliefs to their mothers' influence.[218] Mass-Observation in the 1940s identified a range of superstitious practices and found that 80% of women and 50% of men observed some such practices, whilst superstitious women observed, on average, twice as many as did superstitious men.[219]

If men seemed less inclined to take superstitions seriously, the dangers presented by the working environment constituted one area in which superstitious belief could arise, as David Clark has shown in Staithes.[220] Mr Hudson, an engineer who came to Gornal after the Second World War, recalled the Baggeridge miners as prone to superstitious belief:

> At Baggeridge there was a character there [...] he was the terror of the Dudley police [...] and on this particular morning he was so vile that the workers wouldn't go down, because he said he'd put a curse on them [...] this fellow, whatever his approach was, they knew he was wicked and they wouldn't go down because he'd said he'd put a curse on them, you see.[221]

Most of those, both men and women, who claimed not to be superstitious admitted ruefully that they had observed certain superstitions if, as they claimed, more out of habit than conviction. Such an attitude was typical of several of the Gornal Methodists who formed an Evangelical core to the membership of local chapels, usually incorporating conversion experiences within their spiritual autobiographies. Others, typically regarding themselves and their own generation as less superstitious than their parents' generation, inadvertently demonstrated that superstitious beliefs were still very much in circulation even when they were not recognised as such. Mrs Childs, a lifelong Gornal Methodist recalled chiding her mother for her superstition, a denial of Divine Providence, but she herself seemed to equate superstition with a belief only in bad luck. During the same interview she argued that the number 13 was not unlucky but, on the contrary, lucky for her and her husband:

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[218] e.g. RPMSI, G26, D8, D4, D23, G7, G8, G12, D10, D30 and D17.
[219] M-O A: FR2112, 'Superstition' 7 June 1944.
[220] Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew*, pp. 149-56 and 152-53.
[221] RPMSI, G17. Unfortunately it proved possible to find only a single old miner to interview.

> Yesterday was the 13th. Our lucky day. I was the 13th child and we were married on the 13th. Some would say it's unlucky, but no, it's lucky for us. [...] my mum used to be superstitious [...] I used to say 'Our mum, I can't understand you, you're superstitious and you shouldn't be'. I don't think me mom understood. I said 'You ain't got to be superstitious', I said, 'I'm the 13th the one the baker threw in, I bain unlucky [...] I'm the 13th and I was married on the 13th [...] so 13 ought to be lucky to me'. Whenever it's the 13th, Arthur [her husband] says 'It's our lucky day!' [laughs...] Nothing doesn't seem to go wrong on the 13th.[222]

Practices intended to secure good luck or avoid bad luck were offered by some interviewees as implicit evidence of the moral rectitude of their parents, and as components of a nostalgic image of a better world we have lost. Mr Carter commented:

> They was very superstitious, and sewing on a Sunday and cutting with scissors on a Sunday, that was like their religion, and they learnt we to do the things [...] Me father and mother, I remember his [father's] father and mother, me granny and grand-dad, what we've been talking about, mirrors, scissors, knives and that, they believed in that, so they must have passed it on to me father, so it's come from him to we. There were no arguments with nobody in the street or nothing like today. It was a civilised world.[223]

Mrs Richards linked such beliefs with the exercise of discipline in her childhood home, a feature lacking, she felt, in contemporary homes,[224] whilst Mr and Mrs Young observed that their parents' generation were more superstitious than their own, adding:

> Some of the parents today they don't teach their children like we used to, to respect people and believe in this and believe in the other.[225]

Implicit within such comments, however, was a judgement that these standards were right and proper for an older, but less applicable to a younger, generation. Mrs Beattie of the Wren's Nest Estate, commented:

> Years ago, like as were older than me, they believed all sorts of things, good luck and bad luck.
>
> Q. Did you believe them?
> No, I don't think I did, no.
>
> Q. Would your mother have?
> Oh mother did, yes. Our mother was a good liver, yes.[226]

Moreover, it would be misleading to give the impression that the belief that luck could be manipulated was anything like universal. A majority of interviewees expressed a belief, to a

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[222] RPMSI, G7.
[223] RPMSI, D4.
[224] RPMSI, D23.
[225] RPMSI, D30.
[226] RPMSI, D1.

greater or lesser extent, in some form of charm, ritual or omen, but only a minority adhered to any particular one, and some, as Mass-Observation reporters found in the 1940s,[227] seem to have worked on assumptions along the lines of 'safety first' or 'it can't do any harm and there just might be something in it'. Mrs Beattie, for example, who attended St Thomas's Sunday school as a child but has been a non-church-goer since moving to the Wren's Nest Estate in her teens, was guarded in her assessment of the power of her lucky shoe (kept in her purse), a gift received during her youth, merely remarking that she had not had much bad luck and that life had run fairly smoothly.[228] Mrs Grundy, who had kept a little 'Joan the Wad' in her purse since before her marriage, was similarly restrained, replying to a question about whether the charm had brought good luck with the comment, 'Let's put it this way. If I don't do any worse, I shalln't grumble'.[229]

A Mass-Observation study in 1941 concluded that certain (unspecified) 'superstitious' rituals were carried out, not out of firm convictions as to their efficacy, but as a sort of personal indemnity for any bad luck which might happen in the future, accompanied by an uncomfortable feeling that ill fortune was one's own fault if the ritual were not observed.[230] The sale of lucky charms increased sharply in London during the First World War, but received no comparable boost during the first year of World War II.[231] A belief in the protective power of charms and amulets seems to have been much less widespread by the Second World War than it had been in 1914. Gorer found in the early 1950s that lucky mascots were owned by 15% of respondents to his national survey (1 in 5 women and 1 in 8 men), leaving a large majority who did not, and whilst not all Dudley and Gornal interviewees discussed the matter, several stated that they had never had such objects.[232]

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[227] M-O A: FR 975, 'Report on Superstition', 24 November 1941, Part B, p. 6.

[228] RPMSI, D1. According to the turn of the century folklorist Edward Lovett, the small shoe represented the path of life (cited in Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', p. 128).

[229] RPMSI, G12.

[230] M-O A: FR 975, 'Report on Superstition', 24 November 1941, Part B, p. 4.

[231] M-O A: FR67, 'Are You Lucky?', April 1940 (photocopy of Mass-Observation's Weekly Intelligence Service, *Us*, No. 10, 5 April 1940). Eight large jewellers in the capital had noted that only a few lucky charm rings were exchanged by lovers and fiances, whilst some women wore regimental badges, apparently for luck.

[232] Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955), p. 265.

Popular religious beliefs often paradoxically combined a degree of conviction in the possibility of manipulating luck in a variety of ways with a powerful strain of fatalism and a belief that the future was knowable. The prevalence of fatalism amongst soldiers during the First World War is well-documented,[233] but it also existed outside the context of constant danger in ordinary civilian life. The combination of fatalism and luck manipulation is essentially a re-casting into popular religious terms of the theological tensions between Divine Providence and predestination and free-will.

Whilst the notion of Divine Providence tended towards optimism, popular fatalism sometimes tended to be tinged with a sense of pessimism.[234] Some interviewees, particularly irregular churchgoers, rejected a belief in superstitions and the possibility of securing good luck or avoiding bad luck not on rational grounds, but by reference to the inevitability of fate. In some cases, such beliefs took the form of a resigned fatalism, seemingly unleavened by any sense of divine and providential care. Mrs Beattie and Mrs Heath, born in 1915 and 1911 respectively, both long-time Wren's Nest Estate residents and infrequent churchgoers, were equally sceptical about the possibility of controlling one's own future. As Mrs Heath stated, 'If it's got to happen, it happens' and Mrs Beattie echoed, 'I think what will be, will be'.[235]

Fate was not always so impersonally understood, nor regarded as precluding the possibility of exerting some control over one's own future. Many interviewees combined seemingly contradictory beliefs in the manipulation of luck with a belief in the inevitability of fate.[236] Amongst those who were more inclined to believe in a caring and intervening God, fate was synonymous with Divine providence. Such interviewees, including some regular and irregular churchgoers, were convinced that fate - or a loving and caring God - was not impersonal and relentless but had an interest in their individual happiness, often highlighting as

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[233] Cairns, *Army and Religion*, pp. 160-65; Wilkinson, *Church of England and the First World War*, pp. 162-63; Bob Bushaway, 'Popular Belief on the Western Front'.

[234] An experience of Divine guidance in life-changing decisions, restricted to a small number of committed churchgoers, is discussed in chapter 6.

[235] RPMSI, D18, RPMSI, D1.

[236] e.g. Mrs Tomlins (RPMSI, G29), Mr Beech (RPMSI, G6), Mrs Scott (RPMSI, G26), Mr and Mrs Carter (RPMSI, D4), Mrs Clark (RPMSI, G8).

evidence the peculiar chain of events which brought them together with their spouses.[237] For Mr Beddoe, a childhood Lake Street Methodist Sunday scholar but an infrequent attender as an adult, the teaching received in childhood provided a lifelong comforting firm belief in Divine providence:

> Oh, it [life]'s definitely marked out for us. I don't think anybody is in charge of their own destiny. I think it's all marked out for us. [...] I've always been a great believer in that [...] As I've said, whatever happens I always think about those early, my early chapel days. And I think it is God that is in charge of us.[238]

During the Second World War, some were strengthened in their faith by their enhanced sense of dependence on forces beyond their control. The War seems to have inflected popular religiosity with a reinforced belief in the hand of fate, a popular predestinarianism which resurfaced as a means of accommodating the otherwise emotionally unbearable and morally unacceptable. Mr Grainger, a practising Anglican who saw active service, repeatedly applied the metaphor of only picking the best flowers in the garden when explaining how he reconciled his faith in a benevolent God with his experience of losing friends during the War.[239] Mrs Causer recalled how her mother, not a regular church-goer, carried throughout the War an inner conviction, amounting to faith, that her son, who was on active service, was being watched over and would return safely (he did).[240]

Fate or Divine providence also provided a means of retrospectively rationalising and accommodating perceived failures and painful events, such as the loss of a spouse or a friend or being made redundant.[241] Such a belief was, for some interviewees, a fundamental component of a religious faith which remained otherwise indefinite and unpractised. Mrs Heath, who was amongst the most sceptical of interviewees in relation to the metaphysical claims of Christianity, referred to her own misfortunes, then added, 'I used to think "Why?" and then I thought "Never mind, God works in mysterious ways". And He never puts more on you than you can bear'.[242] For Mr Tranter, brought up a Methodist in Lower Gornal but an infrequent

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[237] e.g. Mr and Mrs Sankey (RPMSI, G2); Mr Raybould (RPMSI, G25).
[238] RPMSI, G4.
[239] RPMSI, D12.
[240] RPMSI, D6.
[241] e.g. Mr Beech (RPMSI, G6); Mrs Hill (RPMSI, D14).
[242] RPMSI, D18.

attender as an adult, the sovereignty of God's will, in what would otherwise be human tragedy, was one of his few firm religious convictions. Referring to apparent medical mistakes resulting in the deaths, by heart attacks, of two friends, Mr Tranter explained:

> No, I think, with this respect now I can definitely say, I believe in God in respect that what's got to happen will happen [...] Now them sort of circumstances, I say, that's fate, that's got to happen. And I'm definite on that sort of thing.[243]

The significance of this belief for Mr Tranter is indicated by his preamble. Perceived truths were sometimes delivered in a more archaic quasi-Biblical language, apparently emphasising their eternal and fundamental nature. Mr Raybould, a fairly frequent (monthly) worshipper at Lake Street chapel as a young man, laughingly rejected as nonsense beliefs in charms, lucky mascots and luck-inducing rituals but then changed the register and pace of his delivery entirely with the comment:

> My attitude to life is this: whatever fate is come unto you, you'll receive whether you're walking across the water or whether you're walking up the road [...] Your fate was written the day you was born.[244]

Such beliefs were often sanctified by the authority of the wisdom of generations. Mrs Clark, the daughter of a Primitive Methodist coal-miner, attended Lake Street (Primitive) Methodist Sunday school as a child and occasionally attended as an adult. She cited her father's words as an expression of a religious truth:

> My dad always used to say, an old saying, 'wherever your death lies your feet will carry you'. He always said that, I remember that from a child.[245]

The belief that there was a divine purpose behind all events, including one's death, frustrated local clergymen. In August 1934, for example, the Reverend Arthur Shepherd, vicar of Dudley (St Thomas's), responded angrily to the popular belief on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estate that the death of the parish priest at St Francis's, Father Loxton, in a motorcycle crash, was Providential, asserting that God would never rely on a mistake which left a sense of tragedy and that Loxton's death was purely an accident.[246] Individual autonomy was given

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[243] RPMSI, G28.
[244] RPMSI, G25.
[245] RPMSI, G8.
[246] *Parish Magazine of St Thomas, Dudley*, August 1934.

greater emphasis by several interviewees, both Anglican and Methodist, who have been regular life-long attenders at their respective churches. Such interviewees argued that whilst God has plans for each individual, everybody had individual responsibilities for the success or otherwise of their own lives, occasionally referring to Scriptural authority for such a stance.[247] It is perhaps significant that whilst fatalistic beliefs tended to be expressed by those whose lives have been characterised by restricted opportunities, six out of the eight interviewees who explicitly emphasised the importance of individual autonomy had experienced cultural and/or economic upward mobility from working-class backgrounds, through extended academic education and/or successful professional or business careers.[248]

The apparent paradox between a belief in the possibility of changing one's luck and in the inevitability of fate is further complicated by popular beliefs in fortune-telling. The fortune-teller was one means to obtain knowledge about the future. In 1947, of Mass-Observation's national panel of (mainly middle-class) respondents, 20% believed in the accuracy of fortune-telling.[249] Gorer found that of a national sample of 275 respondents from the early 1950s 44%, (66% of women and 25% of men) had consulted fortune-tellers at some time, with over 50% claiming that some or all of the predictions had come true and only one in three firmly refuting any such claim.[250]

Fortune-telling, the Mass-Observation researchers concluded, was mostly done by professionals or gypsies and occasionally by relatives or friends.[251] Professional fortune-tellers there undoubtedly were in Dudley and Gornal throughout the period under consideration, and it seems they enjoyed good custom. In the early part of the period, the local press occasionally reported prosecutions of fortune-tellers under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. In 1921, for example, a woman from Aston Road, Dudley was accused of receiving visitors at her home to conduct palm readings, whilst another woman, a widow living in the Munitions Cottages in Dudley, previously cautioned in 1918, was charged with fortune-telling with cards for 'people of much

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247 e.g. Mr Dickens (RPMSI, D7), Mrs Downing (RPMSI, D8), Mr Fletcher (RPMSI, G10), Mrs Beale (RPMSI, G5), Mr Williams (RPMSI, D29), Mrs Cash (RPMSI, D5).

248 The two exceptions were Mrs Richards (RPMSI, D23) and Mrs Tudor (RPMSI, D28).

249 M-O A: *Bulletin*, New Series 5 (January 1947), 'The Supernatural', p.1.

250 Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, pp. 266-67.

251 M-O A: FR1263, 'Belief in the Supernatural', 16 May 1942, p. 3.

lower status'. The magistrates were concerned that their activities were causing a 'good deal of domestic harm [...] in the borough'.[252] Similarly, when another Dudley woman was charged with fortune-telling with cards in 1927, the magistrates expressed their concern that such activity upset people, especially the young, who, they feared, might be disturbed for life.[253]

Oral evidence confirms that fortune-telling was common and that most people would probably have known of somebody to whom they could go to be told their fortunes. Gypsies came to the door and the addresses of specialist fortune-tellers were well-known, some finding customers among their colleagues at work.[254] Fortune-tellers seem always to have been women and women, far more than men, were inclined to visit them. Female social networks supported such activities and women's conversations reinforced interest and belief in them. Mrs Brooks of Lower Gornal, recalled a fortune-teller who lived nearby:

> [...] up the Straits, Mrs Hickman.
>
> Q. Was she someone folk knew about?
> Oh yes, they knew about her. I was told about her. Ladies talked about these things [...] I had to make an appointment to see her.[255]

It is clear that factories with women workers were important centres for the exchange of information on such matters. Mrs Young, who worked at Grainger and Smith's tailoring firm in Dudley for fourteen years from 1940, never visited a fortune-teller herself:

> But I know there used to be some about. Because when you worked - I worked in a factory - and you could hear different ones say, 'Oh I went to the fortune-tellers last night'.
>
> Q. Did you hear a lot of that?
> Oh yes, yeah.
> Q. And did they mostly believe in them?
> They used to believe in it, yes. Some people loved to go.[256]

Some casual fortune-tellers found an interested response amongst their colleagues at work. Mrs Griffiths, who began work in Buxton and Bailey's tailoring factory in Dudley in 1945 recalled:

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252 *DH*, 9 July 1921.

253 *DH*, 30 April 1927.

254 e.g. Mrs Carter (RPMSI, D4); Mrs Griffiths (RPMSI, D10); Mrs Brooks (RPMSI, G2); Mrs Tudor (RPMSI, D28); Mrs Scott (RPMSI, G26); Mrs Heath (RPMSI, D18).

255 RPMSI, G2.

256 RPMSI, D30.

> I think when I first thought about these things was when I went to work. There was a lady there who could tell you your fortune and could read your tea-leaves, so if you'd got anything that you wanted - it started off as a bit of fun, I was 14.[257]

A considerable number of respondents believed that fortune-tellers had some power accurately to predict the future. Many accounts relate how predictions came true. According to the Dudley magistrates in a case brought in 1927, fortunes usually consisted of details about partners, illness, death and children.[258] This continued to be the case. Indeed, the attractions to women consisted in the emphasis on relationships and family, particularly for young women whose future comfort and happiness were so intricately bound up with the identity of their husbands. Mrs Griffiths, for example, recalled:

> In the middle of your twenties you wonder what's going to happen in your life [...] Doreen, she was going with a chappy at the time - Len - and she couldn't make up her mind about it, they'd got engaged but they wouldn't fix a date. And she felt there was something she ought to know and couldn't find out. And she knew I was interested and said would I go with her. And it was a house, the Inhedge [...] we both went and had our fortunes told. She told Doreen to forget this chap she was going with. She told her there was something unknown about him. Later on she found out he was married and he never told her [...] Me, she told me I was definitely going to meet somebody who had either got a motorbike or was going to have a motorbike. And it was two years after that I met you [Mr Griffiths, present at interview].[259]

Mrs Carter, a young adult in the 1950s on the Wren's Nest Estate, was told by a gypsy at her front door that she would have only two children; she had one son grow to adulthood and one child die in infancy. Mrs Hammond, when working at a tobacconist's shop in Dudley, had her palm read in the mid-1950s by a 'proper gypsy' who correctly told her she would have two children separated by quite a few years.[260] The true gypsy was often felt to have authentic powers of prediction, particularly among residents of Gornal where gypsy communities often settled for periods of time, visiting local houses regularly. Nor was it only those on the margins of associational religion who entertained some belief in the power of fortune-tellers. Miss Haywood, for example, a lifelong attender at Wesley Wolverhampton Street Methodist chapel in Dudley, had a friend who read palms and she believed, as a teenager and young adult, that fortune-tellers had some genuine predictive power.[261]

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257 RPMSI, D10.
258 *DH*, 30 April 1927.
259 RPMSI, D10.
260 RPMSI, D16.
261 RPMSI, D17.

The majority of men, whether regular or irregular church attenders, rejected fortune-telling as nonsense. In some cases, male rejection was based on an assumption of short-term individual autonomy and a total rejection of the metaphysical claims involved. Mr Tomlins, not involved in church as an adult, never consulted a fortune-teller and scorned the idea:

> Nobody can tell nobody's fortune. You can tell your own fortune by the things you do, what will happen if you do certain things.[262]

Others, both male and female, rejected fortune-telling not out of disbelief, but out of a sense that it involved danger. For some regular and committed evangelical churchgoers, who continued to subscribe to a theology which embraced both heaven and hell, the danger was clear: fortune-telling was of the Devil. This belief was shared by evangelicals of both the pre- and post-war generation. Present at the annual Gornal Whit Monday festival, fortune-tellers were shunned by Mrs Childs, born in 1915 and a regular attender at Kent Street chapel, as 'the Devil's women'.[263] The sister of Mrs Clark, born in the 1910s, and brought up at Lake Street chapel, believed that a fortune teller who lived opposite their house in East Street in the 1910s and 1920s 'dealt with the devil'.[264] For Mr Latham, born in 1925, a member of Lake Street chapel, fortune-tellers were 'taboo'[265] and for Mrs Jones, born in 1941, a member of Kent Street chapel, they were 'of the enemy, Satan's tactics'.[266]

Amongst churchgoers and non-churchgoers who did not believe so unequivocally in the active powers of a force of evil, the source of fortune-tellers' powers was usually considered unknowable. Only rarely was it attributed to God.[267] More frequently, it was attributed to a source unspecified but separate from the God of Christian belief. Whether the power was believed to be for good or bad depended largely on the nature of the message. Mrs Griffiths was unwilling to say that the power was Godly, but believed it was benign:

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[262] RPMSI, G29.
[263] RPMSI, G7.
[264] RPMSI, G8.
[265] RPMSI, G21.
[266] RPMSI, G19. Also RPMSI, G10. During an unrecorded conversation Mrs Perry, an evangelical Gornal Methodist, also stated her conviction that fortune-telling was of the devil.
[267] RPMSI, D8; RPMSI, G16.

> I think if there's something there for you, I think it comes from [hesitates] a good source, let's put it like that.[268]

The messages were not always comforting, however, and several interviewees who began by saying that they did not believe in fortune-telling then related having had unhappy fortunes told which later came true.[269] 'Not believing' meant for some, the belief that it was not right to seek one's fortune, that it was 'dabbling' in something which we are not supposed to know, and that it was courting disaster. Fear of possible messages of disaster dissuaded many, following upsetting experiences. Mrs Scott's mother-in-law consulted a fortune-teller during a day trip from work to Blackpool in the early 1930s:

> I was expecting [pregnant with] Jack. Her went and her told her, 'My love you're going to have some very bad luck in September'. Her thought it was me. It was her own lad. I've never wanted to go to a fortune teller since, no I wouldn't go to one.[270]

No female respondent agreed with Mr Raybould, that fortune-telling was a 'load of crap',[271] but the extent to which it was felt to have been a desirable experience depended, outside an evangelical core, on the content of previous known revelations. Where the message was comforting fortune-telling constituted another area where women could find that experiences of contact with the supernatural realm supported their emotional investment in the family and in relationships. For those for whom the experience proved unsettling, and seemingly disruptive of family and relationships, fortune-telling was feared, avoided and viewed with some suspicion of inappropriate 'dabbling'. 'Not believing' in fortune telling often meant, amongst women, not disbelief in its power, but a sense that it failed to support, and even threatened, that which was most highly valued.

Conclusion

A belief in the possibility of Divine intervention, or the influence of a less clearly defined superempirical realm in worldly matters - and in the life of the individual - was common to the

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[268] RPMSI, D10.
[269] e.g. Mrs Hammond (RPMSI, D16); Mrs Scott (RPMSI, G26).
[270] RPMSI, G26.
[271] RPMSI, G25.

great majority of interviewees. The specific forms of belief varied, though they did not correlate clearly with degrees of involvement in church or chapel (except in the case of an evangelical minority), the majority combining orthodox Christian beliefs with folk and superstitious beliefs, whether regular churchgoers or not. In many aspects, however, the propensity to believe was gendered. Women were more likely to retain a strong belief in the beliefs they were taught as children, beliefs reinforced by the fact that women were predominantly the vehicles for the transmission of Christian and folk beliefs in the home to the next generation. As the following chapter will show, it was also predominantly women who exercised the virtues of 'practical Christianity', the expression of a belief in the centrality of the ethic of the Good Samaritan in living a Christian life and in gaining the rewards of the afterlife.

Chapter 5

Popular Religious Beliefs 2: the Afterlife and the Means of Salvation

Belief in the Afterlife

If one's mortal future was believed by some to be knowable, but perhaps best left unknown, what of one's immortal future? One of the major tenets of theorists of secularisation, and of historians who accept the overall emphases of the models of such theorists, is that since the late nineteenth century an increasing proportion of the population has become increasingly concerned with this-worldly affairs and has become apathetic towards, or highly sceptical about, all claims to any other-worldly existence. Referring to the working class, John Benson, for example, has written, that 'fewer and fewer of the better off were prepared to look to, and wait for, the rewards that they were promised in the afterlife'.[1] A.J.P. Taylor provided a less courteous assessment. 'The advance in material comforts', Taylor wrote, 'made men less concerned with pie in the sky'.[2]

However, a considerable body of evidence suggests that a belief in life after death remained a significant aspect of popular religious belief. In 1919, D.S. Cairns found that faith in immortality amongst soldiers on the Western Front prevailed across a whole spectrum from committed Christians to those on the margins, and noted a keen interest in the nature of the after-life, though he added with the condescension typical of middle-class observers that beliefs in the afterlife were most commonly vague and untheological.[3] The conditions at the Front may well have heightened such interests, but studies by Mass-Observation in the 1940s and by Geoffrey Gorer in the 1950s confirmed that between 50% and 75% of the population held some sort of belief in an afterlife.[4] In 1940 only 1 in 3 people firmly rejected any belief in an after-life, whilst around 35-40% firmly believed in some sort of after-life.[5] Two years later a further Mass-Observation survey found that around 45% of a sample of 64 respondents to a

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1 John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939* (1989), p. 145.

2 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 145.

3 D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1919), pp. 15-18.

4 Mass Observation, *Puzzled People: a study of popular attitudes to religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London borough* (1947), pp. 27-35; Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955), pp. 253-59.

5 M-O A: FR75, 'Belief in a Future Life' April 1940.

questionnaire about belief in an after-life were firm believers.[6] Only 22% of Gorer's sample in the 1950s firmly rejected any such belief, whilst 47% firmly believed.[7] The situation remains much the same today if questionnaire polls are to be trusted. In 1990, 44% believed in life after death (though curiously, 53% claimed to believe in heaven).[8]

A majority of Gornal and Dudley interviewees expressed some form of belief in an afterlife, most insisting that whilst they may now envisage the life to come in a form different from that which they may have held as children, the belief in some sort of afterlife was a thread of continuity throughout their lives.[9] Only six interviewees of the fifty-four who discussed their beliefs in an after-life were firmly convinced that there was nothing beyond death.[10] The degree of conviction in belief and the importance attributed to the issue varied greatly. Mrs Gould, a lifelong Anglican, claimed always to have believed in a life after death, adding 'If there is not, what is the purpose of life? I can't see any'.[11] By contrast, Mrs Causer, a Priory Estate resident whose involvement with the church as an adult has been sporadic, admitted that she remained unsure but added that she tended to observe her mother's maxim that 'life is for the living, not the dead'.[12] Nevertheless, it is safe to say that if more people were abandoning hope of reaching the doors of the afterlife, preferring to concentrate on more worldly concerns, a large proportion still expected to arrive at the doors eventually. As local Anglican minister Reverend Paul Tongue[13] commented,

> On one level yes, [belief in the afterlife was] almost taken for granted. It was more in terms of 'How do I cope in this world?' than 'Is there an afterlife?' Taken for granted, I think. All the non-churchgoers I knew always wanted a Christian minister for funerals.[14]

Oral testimony in Dudley and the Gornals reveals a variety of beliefs, some of which are idiosyncratic and exceedingly difficult to explain. A belief in reincarnation, for example,

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[6] M-O A: FR1315, 'Report on Death and the Supernatural', 18 June 1942.

[7] Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, p. 253.

[8] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford, 1994), p. 78.

[9] In this respect as in others, the incorporation within the interview sample of a disproportionate number of churchgoers might tend to overestimate the incidence of belief, though the other evidence cited suggests the popular extent of belief.

[10] RPMSI, D1, D18, D25 (Mrs Smart), G1, G9.

[11] RPMSI, D13.

[12] RPMSI, D6.

[13] Curate at St Edmund's Dudley and incumbent at St Andrew's Mission Church on the Straits, Lower Gornal during the 1960s.

[14] Reverend Paul Tongue, interview with the author.

was held by several interviewees of widely varying backgrounds, and rationalised ostensibly on grounds of observation and experience. Mr Raybould, a male factory worker, born in 1916, who attended Lake Street Methodist chapel, Lower Gornal, regularly for many years, referred to 'the Book' as his authority on almost all matters but, whilst outlining an eschatology drawing on the Book of Revelations, declared a long-term belief in reincarnation within families based on his observation of physical and temperamental family likenesses. Mr Young, a Dudley factory worker, born in 1926, a Wren's Nest Estate resident, rarely attended any place of worship as an adult but retained significant elements of Christian, folk and superstitious beliefs, attributing his belief in reincarnation to his conversations with a colleague who claimed to recall an earlier life. Mrs Griffiths, who attended 'Wesley' chapel Sunday school in Dudley as a child but only occasionally attended church or chapel thereafter, has, for many years, had an intuitive sense of her own history of reincarnation, based on an otherwise inexplicable sense of familiarity with places she had previously not visited. Mrs Gould, a primary teacher born in 1940 and brought up on the Priory Estate, a regular attender at St Francis's church, has always believed in a version of the Christian heaven but was attracted by, and prepared to believe in, the possibility of reincarnation (a belief in which she mistakenly attributed to Sikhism), with an element of judgement retained by way of the variable desirability of the life-forms into which the soul may transmigrate.[15] Such beliefs are difficult to explain in terms of social and cultural influences, but they were not as unusual as one might think. Mass-Observation found 4% belief in reincarnation in the 1940s,[16] but Gorer in the 1950s with a much larger survey found 11% belief in reincarnation.[17] In the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-faith society by the later years of the period, residents of Dudley and Gornal were, as chapter 7 discusses, less inclined to accept that Christianity, in its popular or more orthodox forms, had a monopoly on metaphysical truth.

Nevertheless, beliefs in heaven and hell, or in the permanent departure of the spirit to some other place, were more common and more fundamental for a majority of interviewees.

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15 RPMSI, G25, D30, D10 and D13. The belief in reincarnation on the part of a professing Christian gained publicity in the case of the England football manager, Glen Hoddle, at the time of writing.

16 Mass Observation, *Puzzled People*, p. 29.

17 Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, p. 259.

The question of how one secured one's place in heaven revealed much about some of the central tenets of popular Christian theology during the period. Hugh McLeod detected a shift in nineteenth-century popular religiosity 'from magic to moralism', producing what Mark Smith has summarised as an 'optimistic folk pelagianism'.[18] Similarly, Sarah Williams found that 'fulfilling a distinct set of moral and ethical criteria was seen as sufficient to give the irregular church attender the right of access to the hereafter'.[19]

Such an outlook was characteristic of Dudleians and Gornalites on the fringes of the associational culture of the churches between 1914 and 1965 but also, to a significant extent, of those firmly within that culture. A small minority - Gornal evangelical Methodists who had experienced conversion - emphasised unequivocally the centrality of the Atonement and the need to make a decision to accept Christ's offer of salvation. Mr Fletcher, for example, claimed that his teenage conversion experience established as a matter of 'black and white' the reality of heaven and hell and the need to make a decision for Christ.[20] Mrs Jones and Mr Latham, also Gornal Methodists, have remained equally convinced, since teenage or young adult conversion experiences, of the need to make a decision to accept Christ in order to avoid eternal damnation.[21] Mrs Beale, a weekly attender at Himley Road Methodist chapel, Gornal Wood, also experienced a teenage conversion and similarly emphasised the fundamental importance of 'acknowledging' Christ, whilst Mrs Wesley, a lifelong attender at Five Ways chapel, who also experienced conversion, emphasised the need to be 'born again'.[22] Mrs Perry shed the predestinarian theology of her upbringing in the Strict Baptist Robert Street and Rehoboth chapels in Gornal, underwent teenage conversion after becoming involved at Five Ways chapel, and thereafter believed that it was impossible to be good enough to merit a place in heaven, which could only be secured by accepting Christ's saving grace.[23]

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18 Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Britain* (1984), pp. 26-35; Mark Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford, 1994), p. 264.

19 Sarah Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture: A Study of the South London Borough of Southwark c.1880-1939' (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 1993), p. 219.

20 RPMSI, G10.

21 RPMSI, G19, G21.

22 RPMSI, G5, G30.

23 RPMSI, G23.

For those who did not go through conversion, rather than an experience to which they felt they could not aspire, as some of Williams' Southwark residents seemed to have felt, the ideal of conversion amongst twentieth century Dudleians and Gornalians was often considered somewhat offensive, an affront to the Christian beliefs and standards of many of those both without and within regular institutional involvement. Some attended missionary services, but enjoyed them for their own reasons, rejecting the conversionary imperative. The enthusiasm to attend the missionary services combined with an apparent wilful rejection of the offer of salvation puzzled evangelical ministers. Following the 1937 Cliff mission, Reverend Dean Sherriff rejoiced in the conversion of numerous young people, but added

> But some others as surely, have not [accepted the Lord]. They have been at every meeting, heard the powerful, moving appeals of the brethren, yet have not responded.[24]

Oral evidence suggests that missionary events such as the Cliff missions and the earlier Penfold mission in 1920 injected excitement into the routines of local life, an opportunity to hear new people and, in particular, to learn and enjoy new hymns and songs, often remembered well into adulthood and old age. Mrs Brooks, born in 1905 and a Zoar Sunday scholar, attended the Penfold services in 1920:

> Oh Penfold. I loved Penfold. He was an evangelist. And he used to have a tent opposite the old Lake Street, where the new Lake Street is now. I used to be there nearly every night. Oh, it was lovely. I had a hymn book with music in but there are still some of the hymns that I can remember [...] 'In the upper Garden, there' - that was one of his hymns - 'just beyond the River Jordan, just across its chilling tide, there's a land of life eternal.

Her brother, born in 1922, recalled the Cliff missions in a similar way:

> Cliff College, they had the tents up at Ellowes Road and they always used to start off, 'I am H.A.P.P.Y., I am H.A.P.P.Y. , I know I am, I'm sure I am, I am H.A.P.P.Y.'

The attempt to win conversions, on the other hand, was recalled with considerable scepticism.

> Q. Did they try to get people to come to the front?
> Yes, to be converted [...] No, I didn't believe in that myself [...] I think that's up to anybody really, when they get older, to understand.

Conversion was felt to be an unnatural intrusion upon the Christian growth of the child, with any decision about religious involvement continuing into adulthood being more appropriately

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[24] *Joyful News*, 22 April, 1937.

left to private preference. Mrs Brooks, her brother and her brother's wife all stressed that they had not gone through a conversion, adding that it was a matter of upbringing and later of adult choice:

> You were brought up that way. From the time you were born, you went to school and it was brought on to you.
>
> If you feel like it when you get older well it's up to you, isn't it?[25]

Mr Lewis, born in 1932 and a resident of Wren's Nest Estate from the age of four, attended St Christopher's Church of England Sunday school on the Estate during his childhood, but from the age of 16 until the tragic death of his brother in the mid-1960s had no religious institutional involvement at all. Nevertheless, he regarded his return to the fold in his mid-thirties, when he started to attend services and classes at Vicar Street, as the flowering of a faith which had lain dormant but not dead, since his childhood:

> I wasn't a born again Christian, I never say that. 'Cos as I said from the start I was a Christian, born into a Christian family [...] Some people say, 'I'm a born again Christian'. Well I don't know what the definition of a born-again Christian is.[26]

Far from all of the more regular attenders, even at the more evangelical places of worship, were convinced of the salvationary rationale of evangelism. Mr Raybould, born in 1916, a factory floor worker and for many years a regular attender at Lake Street, recalled his impressions of the 1948 Cliff College Mission:

> After all that I said, now that was to try to get the people to come to church all that lot was. To try too get them to come to church. I asked how much money did that cost. It cost a lot of money. I said, 'oh yeah... as I've sat here looking round, what I've heard from other chapels, Five Ways, the Zoar. They're no more different now from what they were before you held the crusade. There's not one difference, and it cost £6,000'.
>
> Q. A waste of money?
> I think so, don't you?
>
> Q. Didn't you think trying to get people to come to church was what Christians should be doing?
> No [...] it's up to the man and girl concerned. If they - it's the same with me, nobody asked me to go , nobody approached me, I just went and enjoyed it and went all the while.[27]

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[25] RPMSI, G2.
[26] RPMSI, D21.
[27] RPMSI, G25.

Local clergy made occasional reference to a perceived popular pelagianism. In March 1941, for example, John Ferley, incumbent at St Edmund's Dudley, wrote in the parish magazine comparing the 'wishful thinking' that the War would soon end with wishful thinking about access to heaven which was, he insisted, only for those who put their trust in Christ and demonstrate it by performance of their religious duties:

> Many base their hope of salvation on wishful thinking. They think "Heaven is for all the decent people. Criminals and people like Hitler will go to hell. I am a respectable person therefore I shall go to heaven when I die". The result is that it is commonly thought that all ordinary people go to heaven at death.[28]

By the 1960s, however, even writers in the organ of the Gornal and Sedgley Evangelical Free Council at times expounded a theology in a way which, in its fundamentals, is difficult to distinguish from popular soteriology. In 1968 the correspondent for 'Wesley' Kent Street Methodist church, Upper Gornal, employed the metaphor of an artist painting an angel, unable to find the appropriate colours to complete it:

> Our lives are similar to a painting, each day we are adding various colours by our deeds and living and one day we shall have to present it to our Great Master, our beloved Lord, and I am sure if we have done what we could in His service faithfully, He will understand our failings and just as the master understood in the studio so He will understand us and He will add to our painting, the few colours necessary. He will love and forgive us, and then we shall be in His presence for ever.[29]

There is little, if anything, here to which those outside the churches would have objected. Whilst the need for God's grace and forgiveness is stated, the emphasis is quite clearly on a future reckoning on the basis of our own efforts, with a loving God who will judge us by our deeds and, loving us, forgive us our few failings. The beliefs of the representatives of 'official' Christianity seemed to be converging with those of popular Christianity by the end of the period, if not before. Zealous advocates of traditional Protestant soteriology were still to be found, in the Pentecostal church of Eve Lane Upper Gornal as well as in the Gornal Methodist churches, but they felt themselves to be struggling against a widespread pelagian theological drift. One S. Bradley contributed on behalf of Eve Lane church one of a series of extended

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28 *Parish Magazine of St Edmund's, Dudley*, March 1941.
29 *The Messenger*, August 1968.

credal statements published in *The Messenger* from the mid- to late-1960s. In an article at the end of the decade, he wrote:

> After so many sermons preached over so many years one would think it superfluous to have to declare this fundamental truth, but we still find many in our congregations and also officers of the church and Sunday School teachers who have never experienced Salvation. The pernicious doctrine of being good and doing our best is still rife amongst us, causing us to disobey the voice of God which commands all men everywhere to repent.[30]

The means of securing a future in heaven, for the majority of interviewees, churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike, were far more importantly defined by what one did than by what one believed. Leading a good and moral life and helping those in need, the practical Christianity which underpinned popular religiosity, was expected to open the doors to heaven. Similar views were elicited, for example, from Mrs Clark, born in 1913 in Lower Gornal, the daughter of a miner, brought up in Lake Street Sunday School until she started courting but thereafter only an occasional attender, and from Mrs Homer, born in Buckleigh, North Wales in 1916, a Salvationist, who moved to live in Sedgley in 1938:

> Well, as long as yom honest and straight and if you can do anyone a good turn, do it for them and be sociable with people.[31]

> Well, I followed the Army teaching, also the Bible teaching and the ten commandments are the best guide, given by God. I think those are a good guide[...] and doing what you would have done to your self, what you know is right and sacrificing.[32]

Mr and Mrs Hood, Ruiton Congregationalists since childhood, were equally convinced that heaven could be reached by living a 'Christian life', the main component of which consisted in a code of behaviour drawing on the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.[33] The point was

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[30] *The Messenger*, February 1969.

[31] RPMSI, G8.

[32] RPMSI, G16.

[33] RPMSI, G15. Mrs Hood has, in the last few years, attended Bible classes which have emphasised Atonement soteriology, which she has now accepted. Her encounter with these ideas was a surprise to her, and profoundly modified the more works-based understanding of salvation which she had maintained for most of her life.

given its simplest expression by Mrs Scott, an occasional attender at St James's Church, Lower Gornal, after marrying a Gornal man in 1932:

> Q. What did you think you had to do in this life to secure a place in heaven?
> Be a good liver, hmm.[34]

This belief survived upward mobility into the middle class where, although the reinforcement of traditional working-class values of good neighbourliness may have been weakened, principles of natural or human justice seemed to sustain such a view of access to heaven. As Mr Gould, born into a working-class Dudley family but now a draughtsman married to a schoolteacher, and a practising Anglican, commented on his mother:

> The concept of the way you live your life is the most important thing. I can only quote my own family. Dear old mum, God bless her, she called herself a Christian, and she's not a practising Christian, I can't remember the last time she went to church, but she's just a fundamentally good person. And therefore I have total belief that if anybody's going to heaven, whatever that heaven might be, she's one that I think will go there. It's a moralistic attitude rather than a religious attitude.[35]

References to the 'Christian' behaviour of immediate and extended family frequently provided the context for a justification by works soteriology, particularly amongst those whose regular involvement with institutional religion may have encouraged, depending on the brand of churchmanship, a more sacramental- or faith-based understanding of salvation which would have left non-practising and non-professing relatives beyond salvation.[36]

The belief that God will admit all good livers to heaven, however, may be partly attributable to a popular refashioning of the image of God in a more modern paternal mould.[37] The evidence from oral testimony to support this argument is largely tangential rather than direct. The frequent emphasis in interviews on the paternal, loving God who watches over us and plans for us, but ultimately allows us the freedom to make our own choices, not necessarily approving but refusing to condemn, was echoed in comments about the differences between the

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[34] RPMSI, G26. For further examples, RPMSI, G12 (Mrs Healey), G2, G29 and D3.

[35] RPMSI, D13.

[36] e.g. RPMSI, D17, D14, D16. Cf. Rory Williams, *A Protestant Legacy: Attitudes to Death and Illness among Older Aberdonians* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 128-30.

[37] This change in emphasis was discernible in the theology of Scott Lidgett in the early twentieth century (Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (1968), p. 123).

way in which interviewees' parents brought them up and the way in which they treated their own children. Many described the strictness of their own parents, the parental expectation of complete obedience and the child's expectation of (frequently harsh) punishment not only for moral or ethical wrong-doing but for any form of disobedience. Some explicitly said that they felt their parents were too strict and most contrasted their own attitudes to rearing children - particularly those who brought up children in the years following the Second World War - claiming to have been less strict, less insistent on obedience to parental wishes (as chapter 7 demonstrates) and more prepared to show affection and to share their aspirations for their children. Occasionally the link between expectations of human paternal love and God's 'fatherly' love was made explicit. Mrs Clark, an occasional Methodist of Lower Gornal, commented:

> I mean to read the Bible, I mean you go to Hell, I thought well I can't visualise Him being [...] I think you make your own hell on earth, don't you? I sometimes, as a kid I used to think wouldn't it be terrible if your dad put you in the fire.[38]

Many interviewees expressed a tension between a belief in a forgiving God, accommodating sinners, and the need to believe in some form of retribution for the worst of sinners. A minority, in addition to the Gornal evangelical converts already discussed, retained a belief in a traditional heaven and hell dichotomy, but hell was generally reserved for cases of extreme wickedness. Mr Bedford, a Wren's Nest Estate resident with little adult involvement in institutional religion, Mr Grainger, a regular at St Francis's church since the late 1950s, Mr Lewis, a Wren's Nest Estate resident with fluctuating involvement in local Methodist churches and Mr and Mrs Gould, lifelong attenders at St Francis's, have all retained a belief that there must be some form of eternal hell for the extremely wicked, such as murderers and terrorists.[39] The dividing line between consignment to heaven or to hell was rarely identified, and the image of a divine 'superintendent' assessing a balance sheet like a school register articulated by Mr Williams, a regular communicant at St Thomas's, Dudley, and a local schoolteacher, succinctly expressed the views of many interviewees.[40]

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[38] RPMSI, G8.
[39] RPMSI, G3, D12, D21, D 14.
[40] RPMSI, D29.

For some, however, the idea of hell was irreconcilable with a belief in a loving God.[41] Mass-Observation, which conducted extensive research into religious beliefs in the 1940s, provided no statistical breakdown of beliefs in hell, only stating that it was believed in much less firmly than heaven with many saying that it was imaginary, and a device to frighten people.[42] Interviewees referred to visual images acquired during childhood, through preaching and Sunday school teaching, of a fiery torment presided over by a very real devil. Parents frequently reinforced the idea of an evil spirit, sometimes in the more folkish person of the 'bogeyman', as a means to scare children into obedience, and such images were usually dismissed by adults as childish.[43]

The extent to which the flames of hell were being preached between 1914 and 1965 in the churches and chapels of Dudley and Gornal is unclear.[44] A recent essay on the theology of local preachers cites an undated but certainly early twentieth century Grimsby Local Preacher's notebook in which the author had noted a prayer at an after-service prayer meeting about sinners and the fires of hell: 'Lord, hold them over the flames. Singe them Lord, but don't burn them'.[45] Punishment, it seems, was not eternal but purgative and limited by God. Locally, Mr Dickens, a Dudley Methodist local preacher, dated the decline in hellfire preaching to the 1950s and 1960s. Certainly hellfire preaching survived longer in the Gornal Methodist chapels than elsewhere locally, and a number of the Gornal faithful became local preachers in the 1960s, specifically to fend off the perceived intrusions of modernist theology which questioned the traditional beliefs in heaven and hell.[46] On the other hand, a sermon preached by another local

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[41] RPMSI, D11 (Mr and Mrs Gould) and G16. For the intellectual debate about hell in the nineteenth century and the declining credibility of the concept for many theologians and other intellectuals, see Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1974).

[42] M-O A: Religion, Box 2, File D [no date]. Robert Currie traces the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century partial shift in Wesleyan doctrines of hell towards the idea of absence from God rather than positive torments (Currie, *Methodism Divided*, pp. 117-20).

[43] E.g. RPMSI, D21 and D28.

[44] Repeated attempts to obtain notes or copies of local preachers' sermons pre-1965, unfortunately met with little response, and none are housed in public repositories.

[45] John Banks, 'Local Preachers and Theological Change: The late 19th and earlier 20th centuries', in Geoffrey Milburn and Margaret Batty (eds.), *Workaday Preachers: The story of Methodist Local Preaching* (Peterborough, 1995), pp. 265-76 (p. 275).

[46] RPMSI, G21.

preacher in the Dudley circuit around 1932 suggests that hellfire preaching had already considerably declined in fervour in some parts of the local circuits by the time of union:

> In olden times the Preacher had a tremendous weapon for arousing consciousness of Sin in that he could threaten eternal damnation. Even the most hearty pagan in the old Days believed in hell, and if the preachers could paint lurid enough colour the fate that awaited the unrepentant sinner, he could move crowds to tears of contrition and fill the church. This weapon is no longer effective and I am the last to wish its return [...] Belief in hell in the next world as [sic] gone but human sin has given us a demonstration of hell upon earth which we who have lived through it can surely never forget.[47]

The term 'hell on earth', according to Jay Winter, was popularised during the Great War, when the trenches were described as hell on earth and hell became located in the trenches rather than the underworld for many people.[48] It remained an important concept in the different context of Black Country society in the twentieth century. The idea that people make their own hell on earth and that the devil was a tempter within was a common means of retaining a conception of suffering resulting from human wickedness with the popular belief in a loving and compassionate God.[49]

Popular theology, drawing on a variety of sources, was frequently less systematic and consistent than official or orthodox theologies. Evangelical Atonement theology did contribute to the complexion of the popular theology of those who encountered it through their Sunday schooling and occasional attendance at the Gornal Methodist churches. Amongst some, mainly older interviewees, a popular pelagianism was accompanied by echoes of the evangelical emphasis on repentance and forgiveness as a precondition to salvation. In a popularised form, it appears that the *language* of evangelical Methodist preaching could exercise an influence which might disguise a less internally consistent set of beliefs about heaven, hell and salvation. Mrs Childs, for example, an Upper Gornal Methodist, when asked whether she believed all souls would eventually go to heaven replied in terms that imply an old-fashioned evangelical belief in the alternatives of heaven and hell and the need for repentance to secure a place in the former:

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[47] Manuscript kindly loaned by Miss D. Clark.

[48] J.M. Winter, 'Spiritualism and the First World War', in R. W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter (eds.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (1992), pp. 185-200 (pp. 192-93).

[49] e.g. RPMSI, D13 (Mr Gould), D17, D28, G7, G12 and G25.

> Oh, no. He's told them, those, the very last minute they can say 'forgive us Lord' and He forgives them, but there's some that never get there and there shall be a fiery furnace for them.[50]

Mrs Childs learnt about heaven and hell in Sunday School and also from teachers at Robert Street day school. Mrs Childs also, however, articulated the much more widely shared popular conception of hell, one which was located in a different - predominantly oral - tradition:

> it was one of those questions I believe that I asked me mum and she couldn't answer it, so she said 'Go and ask your other mother' [a neighbour]. My mom couldn't understand what the word meant, that I asked. And Mrs Greatholder. said it, she said 'People make their own hell on earth'. I always remember. And when I come back me mother said, 'Did your other mother answer?'. And I said 'Our mum, Mrs Greatholder says people make their own hell on earth'. And my mum says, 'Yes, they do, my wench'.[51]

This tradition co-existed with notions of a real otherworldly hell which survived - at least in evangelical linguistic archaisms which tripped off the tongue - in popular lay theology. Mrs Childs was not unusual even among Gornal Methodists in accepting this notion. Indeed, Mrs Greatholder was, for several years, Mrs Childs' Sunday School teacher at Kent Street and thus within the constituency of regular churchgoers.

Mrs Brooks, born in 1905 in Gornal Wood, daughter of a Baggeridge miner, a Sunday scholar at Zoar (ex United Methodist) chapel, Gornal Wood until her teens and thereafter an occasional attender, initially responded to the question as to what she had believed was required to secure a place in heaven with the answer:

> If you live a good life on earth, it takes you to a better life afterwards; following the commandments of our Lord; do right, you know what's right and wrong.[52]

A little later in the same interview, however, she added a comment that was a clear expression of the need for repentance and of salvation by faith:

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[50] RPMSI, G7.
[51] RPMSI, G7.
[52] RPMSI, G2.

> It depends whether they ask forgiveness before they die. And I really believe that the Lord forgives everybody if you ask Him. And you - I can't get the words out - the Lord will forgive you if you believe that he will forgive you.[53]

Similarly Mrs Clark who referred to honesty and straightness and doing people a good turn as the road to heaven had earlier in the interview commented:

> I think he forgives everybody. I mean it says in the Bible the Lord loves a sinner. And if you confess, yes.[54]

Such comments reveal a bridge between the universalist popular theology which emphasised good works - found amongst most irregular churchgoers and also a majority of regular churchgoers outside the strong Evangelical tradition of Gornal Methodism - and the particularist soteriology which was expressed by a number of lifelong Gornal Methodists, emphasising the need for repentance and re-birth.

Such was the over-riding belief in a forgiving God amongst the majority, however, that many Dudley and Gornal respondents were prepared to accept that all would ultimately secure a place in heaven, since 'God loves a sinner'.[55] The belief that God punishes and rewards was sustained either through a belief in a transitional purgatory-like stage or, in some cases, by a belief that dead souls will experience varying degrees of bliss in heaven. The Anglo-Catholic tradition provided a theological framework for such beliefs, and interviewees brought up in this tradition referred to the teaching they received as children in formal catechism classes and to masses held for the dead.[56]

But such beliefs were not confined to Anglo-Catholics.[57] Mrs Griffiths, an irregular attender after leaving 'Wesley' Wolverhampton Street Sunday school, claimed always to have believed in some form of divine punishment and reward, combined with a belief in reincarnation:

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[53] RPMSI, G2.

[54] RPMSI, G8.

[55] RPMSI, G8, G12 and D11.

[56] e.g. RPMSI, D8 (Mrs Downing) and D5. That formal catechising remained popular within local Anglo-Catholic churches (St Edmund's Dudley and St Michael's Tividale) is clear from parish magazines.

[57] Rory Williams found that the Protestant culture amongst older Aberdonians in the late twentieth century was strong enough to preclude the possibility of such beliefs, intrinsically attractive, to be sustained amongst many of his interviewees (Williams, *A Protestant Legacy*, p. 130).

> If your spirit goes and it's been good, well you go on to being good. If you've been bad, I think yes you get punished. I think that spirit is put somewhere to do hard work, not necessarily in another person, but that spirit is put to hard work until it has proved itself that it is good. Then it can go on.

Q. No eternal damnation and hell then?
No. You get a chance. Even the wicked get a chance to repent. They didn't repent on this earth, maybe they will be made to repent, to work hard or whatever.[58]

Mrs Tudor, born in Dudley, and brought up at St Thomas's Sunday school, was also an irregular church attender as an adult and believed that heaven might be like a school of different classes, enjoying varying degrees of bliss.[59] Mrs Hill, who has retained regular connections with Methodism throughout her life was convinced by her parents that the wicked were punished, but equally sure that their punishment was temporary:

> I think some go to another place, because they've got to atone for their sins, haven't they? I mean a murderer can't get off scot-free can they? [...] Oh, the Lord will forgive them. But they'll go a bit later.[60]

Miss Haywood, born in 1923, and throughout her life a regular attender at Wesley Wolverhampton Street Methodist chapel, in recent years a local preacher, described heaven as a series of concentric rings progressively removed from the central experience of bliss which is enjoyed by the true believer and 'good liver', but attainable for those beginning the afterlife in an outer ring, a notion she attributed to the influence of Catholic and Christian Spiritualist friends during the 1950s and 1960s. An almost identical idea was expressed by Mr Dickens, a Methodist local preacher from the 1950s, born in the 1920s, who stated that in his youth and early adulthood he would have envisaged a more clear distinction between heaven and hell and that it was only in the 1960s that he changed his view on the basis of Biblical and theological study, referring to the text, 'In my Father's house are many mansions'.[61] Several other interviewees including those on the margins of church involvement drew directly on Biblical authority to support similar beliefs by reference to - or obvious derivation from - Christ's promise that in his Father's house were many mansions/rooms.

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[58] RPMSI, D10.
[59] RPMSI, D28.
[60] RPMSI, D14.
[61] RPMSI, D7.

If a majority expected some form of eternal afterlife in heaven, only a few had clear images of what heaven would be like. Most, however, conceptualised heaven and the afterlife as a continuation of the individual identity of each person. A distinction between body and spirit was commonly made, the body being described as a shell or husk to be left behind, though a few believed literally in a bodily resurrection and consequently insisted that they did not believe in cremation.[62]

During the years of hardship between the wars, the image of heaven as a land of plenty and a release from suffering and pain was particularly powerful. Mr Latham, a Lake Street Methodist, recalled from his boyhood in the 1920s and 1930s a commonly articulated view of heaven within his church:

> I can remember there used to be a saying in our Sunday school - and this goes back a long long time, I was only a kid when I heard it first - and they said, and you can well imagine how this came about, youngsters and people used to walk about half-starved, they could always eat a meal, and they used to say, 'And when we get to heaven there'll be rivers of broth and mountains of dumplings'.[63]

Such images retained some hold over the popular imagination and were reinforced through the traditions of Sunday school teaching and passed down through the generations orally within families. Mr Gould recalled his non-churchgoing mother's beliefs about the afterlife and their influence on his own understanding:

> [heaven was] a different country, where it was a land of milk and honey and that, I think, has always been the concept that you were brought up with and it lived with you. I don't think it ever really quite dies.[64]

Mrs Gould's image was similarly traditional in its conception of a perfected form of earthly existence, but more explicitly Biblical, and drew on an anti-industrial pastoral nostalgic strain in English culture:

> I can only ever see the garden of Eden, and I'm going to be there. Heaven is the perfect place [...] never seen big chimneys and factories and things like that.[65]

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[62] RPMSI, D22, G3 and G29 (Mrs Tomlins attributed this belief to a close relative). As John Morley notes, cremation took a long time to be accepted in Britain; not until 1968 were more than 50% of bodies cremated (John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (1971), pp. 91-2).

[63] RPMSI, G21.

[64] RPMSI, D13.

[65] RPMSI, D13.

Other interviewees associated heaven with luxury, the absence of bodily pain, and physical rest, whilst hell was characterised as a place of twenty-four hours-a-day work in intolerable conditions.[66]

More common and more fundamental, however, than utopian images of heaven as paradise was the belief that the afterlife would bring reunion with loved family members. Amongst both churchgoers and non churchgoers this reunion was the salient image of the afterlife rather than the expectation of being in the presence of God. Reverend Paul Tongue's claim that understandings of the afterlife were mainly characterised by the 'simplistic idea that we're going to meet our marriage partner',[67] was substantiated by oral evidence. Mrs Downing, a Dudley Anglican, stated her belief in the afterlife without hesitation:

> I have never had any doubts. That is a firm belief without having too much said about it. Those who have no belief at all, it must be very hard to face death. If you believe that is what happens you're not really afraid of dying. And you go to see all the people who have gone before.[68]

Similar beliefs were expressed by, amongst others, Mrs Tudor, a Dudley lapsed Anglican, Mrs Healey, a Lower Gornal Anglican and Mrs Clark an occasional attender at Lake Street Methodist chapel:

> I always think the others will be waiting for me. All of them, all them what have gone on before.[69]

> Oh yes, I do yes. I think we shall all meet.[70]

The belief that the spirits of loved family members awaited one in the afterlife extended, for some, to a sense of comforting and personal spiritual guidance and concern. Mrs Griffin, brought up an Anglican but a teenage Methodist convert, lost her father at the age of 3, but believed that he was in heaven and looking after her, an enduring source of comfort:

> I think what you're taught when you're young it's very difficult to off-load. Now I was told my father had gone to heaven. When you're told that when you're three, I just don't think you can off-load it, it's too much a part of you and it was a comfort and so I believed that.

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66 RPMSI, D11 (Mrs Griffin), D21, D4, D12, G21, G30 and G5.
67 Interview with the author.
68 RPMSI, D8.
69 RPMSI, G8.
70 RPMSI, G12. See also, RPMSI, D7, D14, D23, G15, G26 and G2.

> And I've always felt there was somebody there who knew about me, of a kind. And it's sort of a comfort.[71]

Her husband, despite an active involvement in the local Methodist churches, was reassured by a belief in the possibility of his dead grandmother offering intercessionary prayers on his behalf:

> I came to that as an adult when grandmother died. This idea of the Catholics, the intercession of the saints in heaven, and when certain things went well for me, I always felt that perhaps there was grandmother offering her intercession. But I came to that in my middle twenties, I'm not sure how strongly or firmly but at times it was a source of consolation to me, yes.[72]

The Road to Heaven - Practical Christianity

Popular religion, spanning both regular and irregular churchgoers, incorporated the belief that one earned one's place in heaven by living a good life. Of what such a good life consisted, and the extent to which social behaviour was, or was perceived to be, influenced by religious belief, form the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Sociologists and historians concerned with the social impact of religion, have explored the extent to which religion provided the basis for codes of behaviour and moral and ethical standards. Hugh McLeod, in a 1986 review of the oral evidence, noted the importance of 'practical Christianity', a belief in the importance of living an honest, moral and generous life.[73] Sarah Williams has compared the behaviour expected of the 'true believer' with that expected of those outside the constituency of the committed churchgoers, exploring the ways in which Christian values were taken up and reinterpreted within a popular culture which presented Christ as the embodiment of practical Christianity.[74] Robert Moore argued of the Durham pitmen at the turn of the century that 'religion is expressed in social relations, attitudes and ways of doing things, not in theological formulations'.[75] Robert Towler has made a similar point, arguing that the social consequences of religious belief are the heart of religion itself:

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71 RPMSI, D8 (Mrs Griffin).

72 RPMSI, D8 (Mr Griffin).

73 Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Working Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History*, 14 (1986), pp. 31-49 (p. 35).

74 Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', chapter 5.

75 Robert Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 25.

> Belief in the supernatural is in itself a comparatively trivial phenomenon. What is significant is the implications which such a belief has for people's actions, and it is these implications which form the substance of religion, not the belief itself.[76]

It is difficult enough, however, to trace the implications of religious belief for people's actions. The inherent difficulties in determining the *consequences* of religious belief are even more substantial. The historian is confronted by the problem of disentangling the influence of religious belief from dominant secular social mores - for example, working-class norms of behaviour - in the attempt to identify the determinants of behaviour. Elizabeth Roberts acknowledges these problems, but discerns the importance of a pervasive Christianity underpinning the good neighbourly ethic of her Lancashire respondents:

> It is always difficult to equate belief and action - indeed, it is impossible to demonstrate that a specific action followed from a particular belief - but many working-class attitudes seem to have come directly from the Church's teaching.[77]

Nevertheless, her account gives little sense that the working-class neighbourhoods in her chosen areas of study *needed* a religious imperative in order for good neighbourly behaviour to take root. Rather, such behaviour was apparently integral to the neighbourhood culture of the working class who enjoyed, though did not calculate upon, the mutual benefits consequent upon such localised solidarity. Similarly, Ellen Ross has traced female, working-class, informal networks of mutual assistance within neighbourhoods in London before the First World War without explaining such activities by reference to values derived from religious beliefs.[78]

It is undoubtedly difficult to trace a precise line of cause and effect. Whether working-class neighbourhoods would have functioned differently in the absence of a pervasive Christian belief in the importance of practical Christianity, it is impossible to say. Whether working-class understandings of Christianity would have given considerably less emphasis to such practical matters in the absence of strong neighbourhood and community ties is equally impossible to determine. It seems likely that the two were mutually reinforcing: working-class social mores were underpinned and given an ideological basis by the belief in the importance of practical

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76 Robert Towler, *Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion* (1974), p. 144.

77 Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 4-5.

78 Ellen Ross, 'Survival networks: women's neighbourhood sharing in London before World War One', *History Workshop*, 15 (1983).

Christianity; the same social mores and the material conditions of working-class life brought into the foreground the practical implications of Christian belief.

Oral evidence, prone to the anecdotal as it may be, does at least provide the opportunity to explore the interpretations given by working-class respondents to their own and their families' behaviour. In Dudley and Gornal, charitable and neighbourly actions were frequently understood to be the appropriate expressions - indeed, the defining marks - of a Christian life. Many twentieth-century Dudley and Gornal residents, including many who were regular churchgoers, were convinced that the mark of the true Christian was less his/her willingness to subscribe to a creed than his/her preparedness to act as a Christian in sustaining charitable relationships with family, friends, neighbours, and even with fleeting acquaintances. It needs to be demonstrated, however, that such a belief translated into behaviour. The limits of practical Christianity need to be clarified - family, neighbours, the church community and/or more marginal elements, such as the poor and social outcasts - and whether such limits were confined to the local, or to a wider context. The vehicles considered appropriate for, and actually used for, the exercise of charity and/or other forms of assistance to those in need also need to be identified: personal contacts, and formal and informal channels through local churches and chapels. This chapter will attempt to identify the contexts within which practical Christianity was exercised and its boundaries, and whether it was systematic and regular or spontaneous and occasional.

In addition to 'practical Christianity' and material sacrifice, the consequential dimension of religion embraces a set of personal ethics and consequent behaviour exemplified in issues such as drinking, gambling and swearing. Here too, oral evidence is beset with problems, particularly when dealing with conversion narratives, emphasising deliverance from a life of sin to a life dedicated to the service of Christ and his church, with their tendency to exaggerate the differences in lifestyle between the saved and the unsaved soul.

There was no universally agreed moral position on drinking, gambling and swearing to compare with the hegemonic status of practical Christianity. Since such activities rarely, in themselves, harmed others, they were often regarded with some leniency, and occasionally indulged in, by many who considered themselves good Christians. The avoidance of drink,

gambling and bad language thus served both as a means of visibly expressing separation from the values of the world for the converted and the target for charges of hypocrisy amongst the wider population. Such ethical behaviour, however, was not exclusively the mark of the convert. It also informed the attitudes of a much wider constituency to a significant degree.

Those who accepted Jesus' invitation to 'take up my Cross' to the extent of fundamentally changing the course of their lives were few and far between. Moreover, the meaning of 'taking up my Cross' varied according to circumstances. For the majority of the working class, with little in the way of material possessions to forego, such an injunction could mean a change in conduct, disassociating oneself from the sorts of worldly behaviour identified above. Although there were, amongst the interviewee sample, a number of people testifying to conversion experiences, most were already within the orbit of organised religion. Few were hauled up from the moral abyss which was, in any case, owing to the pervasiveness of Christian values and beliefs, more sparsely populated than the spiritual and conversionary discourses of organised religion might lead one to believe.

For those with more in the way of material possessions to lose, 'taking up my Cross' could, though rarely did, mean accepting a change which directly affected one's material prospects. The one interviewee whose life took such a change, Mr Beckley, the son of a Primitive Methodist minister, radically altered the direction of his life on the basis of the growing conviction that 'Christianity is practical'.[79] In the mid-1920s, he left a fledgling but promising small business in Coventry to run a Bible Class for young men at Vicar Street chapel in Dudley, many of them under-privileged and in trouble with the law, and soon afterwards began a career as a Probation Officer, a field of work in which he was able further to pursue his vocation to help troubled young men.

The great majority did not take their practical Christianity so neat. Rather, it was tempered with the part common-sense and part-theological belief that moderation in most, if not all, things was a virtue and an appropriate response to God's way of doing things. As Mrs Heath put it, 'I think sometimes, well He don't seem to put more on me than I can bear. I've

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[79] RPMSI, D2.

sort of lived as good as I can try'.[80] A Christian response to the trials and tribulations of life could be, and was, properly negotiated within the constraints of ordinary day-to-day life.

The first part of this chapter has demonstrated that popular religious belief in the efficacy of good works in securing a place in heaven was characteristic not only of those on the fringes of associational religion, but also of much of the regular church-going constituency. The popular understanding of Christianity which emphasised neighbourliness and generosity was understandably unpopular among clergymen and church leaders who wished to emphasise the importance of religious duties and attendance at church services. It was nevertheless frequently recognised - and bemoaned - by clergymen as pervasive. John Ferley, incumbent of St Edmund's church complained in 1939 that 'the English think that what a man does is more important than what he is, and that it is more important to do good than be good':

> Today almost everything else is exalted as the heart of religion except the duty of worship. It is commonly thought that the chief aim of religion is to make men good, or to teach men to serve their fellowmen.[81]

In 1941, the assistant curate at St Christopher's, Reverend J.E. Tinsley complained about the low number of Easter communicants and added:

> Never has the devil found a more potent weapon for enervating and weakening the followers of Christ than the various "watered-down" forms of Christianity we find today, and more than all, the sentimental religiosity which confuses Christianity and mere good nature.[82]

Similar complaints emanated from the incumbents of the Gornal churches. In July 1956, for example, the vicar of St Peter's Upper Gornal complained that many confirmees in the parish failed to take regular communion and criticised parishioners for observing the commandment 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', whilst ignoring others.[83] Jesus' message was understood to be centrally concerned with practical rather than metaphysical matters, and the Christian's duties to consist in following his example as the perfection of human living, rather than accepting the offer of a spiritual new life, as local clergy realised.[84] The belief in the fundamental importance of charitable and neighbourly behaviour was underpinned by the

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80 RPMSI, D18.
81 *St Edmund Parish Magazine*, June 1939.
82 *St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher' Church*, May 1942.
83 *St Peter's Parish News*, July 1956.
84 e.g. *St Edmund Parish Magazine*, March 1957.

sayings of Jesus and by the example his life. As Reverend Peter Baker of St Luke's church, Dudley, commented in 1956, 'many of Christ's sayings are frequently quoted by those who never enter a church; for example, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self". Such people were, he added, selective in their practice of the Lord's commandments.[85]

The message from the churches and from affiliated organisations sometimes tended to encourage the popular emphasis on good neighbourliness as the root of the Christian life. In November 1961, the parish magazine of St Luke's, Dudley, carried a summary of the argument of a sermon recently preached in the church. Based around the parable of the Good Samaritan and the 'grace of neighbourliness', the summary concluded, 'according to some interpreters the two pence are the two sacraments of the Gospel'.[86]

The idea that Christianity was a practical matter, of loving care for others more than dutiful worship, was occasionally voiced and reported by representatives of Christian bodies throughout the period. In 1927, for example, an address of Dr F. Milnes Blumer to an auxiliary branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Dudley was reported in the local press. Christianity, Blumer argued, consisted in the 'practical life laid down by Christ - love of God and love of neighbour'. Many, he continued, try to carry out these principles and never go to church whilst many 'so-called' religious people 'masquerade at religion on Sundays' then become the greatest negators of Christianity during rest of the week. The Christian non-attender, he concluded, is to be preferred to the 'religious' attender.[87] There existed a widespread sense that Christianity not only could, but probably did, exist more vitally outside than inside the churches. A letter from 'An Average Man' to the local press in 1925 argued that organised religion has less hold on people than ever, but added 'Nobody would seriously urge that the average man is openly hostile to the "real thing"' but he had 'no use for the type produced by the church'. The problem with the churches, the correspondent concluded, lay in their appeal to a 'middling sort' oblivious of 'wider social concerns'.[88]

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85 *Parish Magazine of St Luke*, July 1956.
86 *Parish Magazine of St Luke*, November 1961.
87 *DH*, 22 October 1927.
88 *DH*, 29 August 1925.

This same sentiment lay at the heart of popular Christianity, and was central to recollections of Sunday school teaching. The message of Sunday School recalled by Miss Haywood, a Dudley Methodist, emphasised the idea that church attendance on Sunday was worthless without practical expressions of Christianity during the week.[89] Mrs Kenny, born in 1935, who attended Ruiton Congregational Sunday school as a child, rarely attended any place of worship as an adult but ensured that her daughter attended Sunday school, expressed the belief clearly:

> If you were brought up right [...] and if anybody wants anything and you're willing to help them [...] well that's better than going to church and just looking at somebody with an hat on [...] You don't have to go to church to do good. You have your faith, your belief and say your prayers [...] you haven't got to go to church to help [...] If you went to church and as soon as you got home, all you learnt at church you forgot and you think, 'Oh let them get on with it', there's no point in that.[90]

Mr and Mrs Young, Wren's Nest Estate residents who have rarely attended church since adulthood, nevertheless considered themselves Christians. Mrs Young explained, 'I think sometimes we do more good than those who go to church and are supposed to be Christians'.[91] Mrs Tomlins, who attended Methodist Sunday school in Coseley but rarely attended church as an adult living in Lower Gornal, argued that attendance at church was unnecessary either for the spiritual or the practical exercises of Christianity:

> I've always thought I'm as good as any of them. I've always thought there's no need for me to go to church on a Sunday, because I'm as good a Christian as what any of them am. If I've got to pray or say anything to God, I can say it in my own home. That's how I think. If I can help anybody, I'll help anybody, and I won't do anybody no harm.[92]

Assisting those in need was regarded as a fundamentally Christian act. In many cases, the Christian credentials of parents who were regular or irregular church attenders were attested to by interviewees by reference to their readiness to proffer such assistance. The spontaneous charity of responding to, or even anticipating, immediate need was exercised predominantly by women, an extension of the domestic economy beyond the household to incorporate others. The constituency of 'others' could extend from family members to those begging at the door. In

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[89] RPMSI, D17.
[90] RPMSI, G20.
[91] RPMSI, D30. Cf. RPMSI, D24.
[92] RPMSI, G29.

some cases, where local kinship networks were extensive, members of the extended family were regular recipients of favours both large and small. Large favours often consisted of long-term care for family members other than one's own children. Miss Haywood explained her conviction that her aunt was a 'good lady' and had gone to heaven on her death, when Miss Haywood was sixteen, by reference to her generous assistance to her relations, accommodating orphaned children and eventually moving out of her own house to provide living space for a married couple, but never taking selfish advantage of the self-improvement she had achieved by training to do clerical work: 'she thought of everybody else before herself'.[93]

Family favours were not always on such a grand scale, but could be frequent and, particularly in the context of inter-war austerity, significant. Mrs Griffiths who, as a child, lived in Stafford Street, central Dudley, with her grandparents, remembered the incessant activity of the home, as she and her grandmother made clothes and rag rugs for local extended family, leaving little time for reading: 'Grandma was always knitting socks [...]Everybody had socks!'.[94] The charitable ethic was reinforced by the day-to-day experience of working-class life, typified by the intimacy of huddled housing and open doors. Small-scale help was often extended beyond the family by women drawing on the (often meagre) reserves of domestic provision. Mrs Hood, a member of Ruiton Congregational chapel, recalled the frequency with which assistance was provided not only to family but to neighbours in the same street in Ruiton during the inter-war years:

> Oh they would help one another [...] we lived in a row of terraces and we were in and out of each other's houses [...] If there was washing to be done and somebody was poorly, they'd go and help do the washing. Or cooking, they'd take food to them [...] people lived pretty happily together and would help one another [...] anyone in the street who needed help.[95]

Mrs Griffiths' grandmother's socks found their way into the homes of friends as well as family, but charitable assistance did not stop with friends either. Asked what, in her youth, she had thought being a Christian meant, Mrs Griffiths immediately referred to the neighbourly charity

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[93] RPMSI, D17.
[94] RPMSI, D10.
[95] RPMSI, G15.

of her grandmother who, despite being sternly 'Victorian', discriminated only by need and refused to make moral judgements about the recipients:

> Look after the ill. Just be there for people. Not to be selfish [...] My grandma [...] she'd got a heart of gold really. She would help people. There was a couple that used to live close to us. I don't think they were ever married. But grandma would send them their lunch [...] They weren't elderly, but really poor, just tiles with sacking on the floor. Grandma made sure they had a Christmas dinner. And if anybody came to the door collecting, she'd give. She couldn't afford it really.[96]

Not only was it mainly women who practised such discreet and spontaneous occasional charity, it was mothers who taught their children its Christian importance. Mr Latham, whose mother stopped regularly attending Himley Road Methodist chapel in Gornal Wood before his birth, remembered her insistence on this point:

> I've heard mother say many a time when people were ill in the street, 'This is what Christians have got to do, we've got to help one another and be kind to one another and love one another'.[97]

There is, nevertheless, some evidence that there was some expectation of a return for one's good deeds.[98] It was not, however, expected that the help would come from the recipient of one's own charity who, in some cases, were unlikely to be able to offer help in any foreseeable future. Rather, it was believed that the world works in such a way as to return good for good, whilst some, in what amounts to a popularised form of the parable of the loaves and fishes, explicitly believed that God ensured that the charitable would never suffer want as a result of their good deeds. Mrs Griffiths concluded her account of her grandmother's charitable activities by commenting, 'It comes around, because when you want help it comes back'.[99] Mrs Childs, a regular Methodist claimed that her parents, occasional attenders at Mount Zion chapel in Upper Gornal, would always give something:

> We never turned anyone away, whatever we had got Mom and Dad would share, that was why we never went without, the Lord saw that we had something.[100]

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96 RPMSI, D10.

97 RPMSI, G21.

98 Michael Anderson has argued that kinship relations in mid nineteenth-century Preston were characterised by an 'exchange theory of values' (i.e. mutual advantages were quickly gained), *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (1971), p. 178.

99 RPMSI, D10.

100 Manuscript autobiography of Mrs Childs (RPMSI, G7) kindly loaned to the author, p. 4.

Such charity could be unsought but generously provided to the families of poor neighbours, like Mrs Greenfield who lived in the same street in Upper Gornal during the 1920s:

> One day my mom saw Mrs Greenfield's son going to school and his behind was hanging out and mom called him in and gave him Edward's old trousers and shirt and mended his old clothes for him to have back at end of school day.[101]

Mrs Hill, whose parents were occasional Methodist attenders, recalled their insistence on the connection between acting charitably and their Christian faith:

> Our door was never closed on anyone. And he'd say, 'Well that's what I'm supposed to be a Christian for, to help people'. I've known my mother, during the war, she'd unpick an old coat and if she'd seen a child in the street with hardly anything on [...] if she'd got an old coat or one I hadn't wanted to wear anymore, she'd unpick it and wash it and give it to that child [...] neither of them ever put themselves first, they always did things for other people.[102]

Such help had to be discreet in order to be Christian. Mrs Griffiths, impressed by the charitable behaviour of her non-churchgoing grandmother, felt that for the Christian it was fundamentally important 'to do things and not to be seen to be doing things'.[103] Mrs Childs made the same point: 'the people of Gornal never used to show what they was doing for people. Mother always hid things under her pinny when taking something for somebody'.[104] But her mother's charity was not confined to friends and neighbours. As Mrs Childs recalled, 'Mom used to give clothing to the old gypsy woman'.[105] Such actions were underpinned not only by the belief that 'the Lord will provide', but also by the Biblically-derived insight that the recipient may be the Lord himself:

> My dad, he always said, 'You never turn anyone away. You never know who it might be'. It's said my Lord might be a tramp. Dad used to say, 'There's always a welcome on the mat'. I used to say, 'Dad, it could be our Lord'. And he'd say, Yes my wench'. He never turned nobody away.[106]

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[101] RPMSI, G7.
[102] RPMSI, D14.
[103] RPMSI, D10.
[104] RPMSI, G7.
[105] RPMSI, G7. The significance for Mrs Childs of generosity to such a recipient can only be fully appreciated in the context of Mrs Childs' own misgivings about the physical and moral standards of local gypsies.
[106] RPMSI, G7.

Mrs Childs' father, despite his illiteracy and his failure for much of his life to attend chapel regularly, was Biblically knowledgeable (Mrs Childs, as a child, used to read to him), and recognised the practical implications of the possibility of, amongst other things, Christ's Second Coming.[107] More commonly, the standards expected of, and exercised by, men in terms of practical Christianity were somewhat less demanding than those of women, whose role as carers underscored the Christian importance of the activities described. In a report of 1943, Mass-Observation reporters concluded that for many people religion consisted in,

> living a fairly decent life. If you're not doing any harm and trying to be decent in your own circle it doesn't matter about going to church.[108]

Not doing any harm, and not hindering, perhaps facilitating, the more active practical Christianity and Sunday church attendance of female relatives, was frequently the standard of Christian conduct applied to and by men, particularly those outside the constituency of regular churchgoers. Mr Hammond, who has rarely attended any place of worship as an adult, stated that he had always believed that Christianity involved trying to help people then added 'you certainly wouldn't do them any harm, you know.'[109] For Mr Beddoe, also a rare attender as an adult, Christianity consisted in living righteously and trying 'not to make things hard for other people to do'.[110] The same standard was applied by the Salvationist Mrs Homer, whose husband preferred the sociability of the pub to that of the chapel:

> He used to go occasionally with me. But to me he was a better Christian than a lot of them that go. Because he used to let me go and I used to go visiting, I went sick visiting for years. And I'd be out of the house for a length of time, and he never grumbled.[111]

Such men, usually the breadwinner and dedicated to providing for their own families, sometimes thought that their wives were misguided in their generosity beyond the confines of the home. Mrs Griffiths, whose grandmother helped extended family and needy neighbours around Stafford Street, claimed that her grandfather 'always thought grandma was too soft'.[112]

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107 The Second Coming was preached in Gornal in 1920 during the Penfold Mission, which produced a number of conversions.

108 M-O FR1612, 'Faith and Fear in Postwar Britain', 15 February 1943, p. 5.

109 RPMSI, D16.

110 RPMSI, G4.

111 RPMSI, G16. Cf. RPMSI, G5.

112 RPMSI, D10.

Mr Griffin, who lived with his grandparents on the Priory Estate in the 1940s, recalled that his grandmother was known locally as 'a saint' for her neighbourly charity, but added that she was 'soft', too good for her own good and kind 'to the point of stupidity'.[113] Some were deliberately, if gently, mocking of their wives' charity. For example, Mrs Homer, a Salvation Army member who invited poor and troubled youths into her home recalled her husband teasing her by deliberately confusing the gender of her young visitors.[114]

The demands on men in terms of behaviour were not so strict as they were for women, and the ultimate test of a man's goodness was often felt to be his efforts to support his family. A degree of drinking, gambling and bad language was often accepted as characteristics of male culture, but a man's determination to provide for his family was, in the minds of several respondents, linked with, or even evidence of, his Christian faith. Mrs Tomlins, born in Coseley in 1930, recalled her father who rarely attended church:

> My father, he was, he used to work hard. He used to like his drink of beer, didn't he John? He used to like to drink, he used to like a gamble. He used to like a go on the 'orses, but he always worked for his family, and he was a very very strong believer - he never went to church or chapel - but he was a very very strong believer, a very strong believer.[115]

This focus on responsibilities to the family was sometimes explicitly linked to a religious up-bringing, and a Sunday school emphasis on the loving family. Mr Tranter, an occasional Gornal Methodist who attended Zoar Sunday school as a boy, claimed never to have departed from the beliefs fostered by Sunday school and concluded that living a Christian life involved doing one's best, particularly for family:

> I'd always got my own beliefs from when I was young and went to Sunday school and that. And I was always brought up to that way of thinking. And I haven't changed my beliefs since then. I hope that I've done me best for me family as I think so. I'd like to have done a bit more, but over life that's the way things go.[116]

The neighbourhood was not the only community within which practical Christianity was exercised. Churches and chapels also formed communities for the extension of discreet

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[113] RPMSI, D11.
[114] RPMSI, G16.
[115] RPMSI, G29.
[116] RPMSI, G28. Cf. Mrs Tomlins' father whose drinking habit she excused by reference to his redeeming qualities: he was a 'very strong believer' and 'always worked for his family' (RPMSI, G29).

charity during times of individual or widespread financial distress. When in September 1912 members of the Rose Hill Good Samaritan Aid Society of Wesley chapel in Dudley investigated the circumstances resulting from the death of a son with the intention of helping the family if appropriate, 'the deputation gleaned that the parents had already received help from members of the congregation and elsewhere sufficient to meet their requirements'.[117] Mr Hughes, born in 1938 to a family of Kent Street Methodists in Upper Gornal, recalled as a boy accompanying his father, a moulder who had achieved relative financial comfort, around the village at Christmas:

> At Christmas, there were lots of widows in the chapel and people like that and I always knew, we used to go round and visit them and hand them an envelope. I know from my mother that he would give money out of principle really.[118]

The work of the local churches was, in part, judged by the same standards. The efforts of the churches to assist those stricken by poverty, through institutional and informal charity, *ad hoc* responses to acute crises (such as the 1921 and 1926 miners' strikes/lockouts) and annual events in aid of poor children and the elderly infirm at times such as Harvest and Christmas, were regarded favourably by local people, sometimes explicitly noted as a mark of the authenticity of their Christian profession.[119] In 1921, for example, a correspondent to the local press applauded the vicar of Lower Gornal for establishing a soup kitchen, adding 'This is what the church should be out for, feeding the hungry as in the past', whilst interviewees occasionally commented unfavourably on the post-war trend for Harvest produce to be auctioned rather than going to the sick, elderly and needy.[120] Beneficiaries of charity from the

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117 Rose Hill Good Samaritan Aid Society Minute Book, 1907-1936, September 1912.

118 RPMSI, G18.

119 Local press and church and chapel records provide abundant evidence of such activities, sometimes in support of church and chapel members, but often spread more widely. See, for example, *St James Lower Gornal Parish Magazine*, April 1904; *St Edmund's Dudley Parish Magazine*, December 1928; *St Thomas Parish Magazine*, November and December 1932, January, February and December 1933; St Thomas PCC Meeting Minutes, 17 October 1932; St Francis's PCC Minutes, 5 September 1934; King Street Methodist Leaders' Meeting Minutes, 10 June 1910, 22 September 1911, 25 September 1923, 18 September and 24 November 1924; Salop Street Wesleyan Methodist Leaders' Meetings Minutes, 17 December 1928; Rose Hill Good Samaritan Aid Society Minute Book, 1907-39; Will of Thomas Fountain, 1846, contained in documents relating to various charities, Wesley chapel, 1 bundle; Will of Mark Round, 1919, contained in documents relating to various charities, Wesley chapel, 1 bundle; Treasurer's Notebook, Fountains Charity, 1898-1920; *The Messenger*, October 1921; G&SFCC Minutes, November 1909, 1911-15; *DH*, 14 December 1918, 26 November 1921 and 5 January 1924.

120 *DH*, 26 November 1921; RPMSI, D28.

churches, Anglican and Nonconformist, could retain memories of such kindnesses, particularly poignant when received during times of economic hardship in the 1920s and 1930s. Many would have echoed the succinct expression of one of Stephen Humphries' Bristol interviewees, a woman born in 1910: 'Religion was almost the welfare state, it was there that we discovered a lot of happiness and security because they provided so much'.[121] Sometimes such support provided a strong emotional tie which later drew them into a closer involvement with the church in middle- or old-age and even to an open profession of Christian conversion. An infamous miner at Baggeridge colliery, for example, who had spent much of his working life drunk and in gaol, unexpectedly started to attend St Paul's Protestant church in Lower Gornal. Though usually drunk and harbouring a taste for heckling the preacher, he was tolerated by the congregation and later declared he had 'given his life to the Lord'. Questioned by a friend about his conversion, his reply, as recalled by the visitor, was:

> When I was a youngster I came to the Mission [St Paul's] Sunday school. And we were very poor but this Christmas [...] they gave all the lads a new pair of boots and all the girls a pair of shoes. And when I started to come into St Paul's even though I was drunk, I remembered the kindness that had been shown.[122]

'Un-Christian' Behaviour

Hypocrisy was the charge most frequently levelled at regular churchgoers by those who rarely attended, particularly in relation to the issue of drink. Perceived hypocrisy - 'un-Christian behaviour' - was also the reason frequently given for withdrawal from involvement in organised religion. When the expectation that the church or chapel would provide a community of generous and charitable like-minded people was disappointed, some decided to withdraw from active involvement.[123] Mr Bailey, a Ruiton man who attended Ruiton Congregational Sunday school in the 1920s and 1930s, claimed:

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[121] Bristol, R61.

[122] RPMSI, G17.

[123] A Mass-Observation report of 1948, based on 101 replies to the subject 'Why I don't go to church', posed by a London clergyman, concluded that the crucial objections were based more on the perceived mismatch between tenets and practices than on disbelief in the central tenets of Christianity. 'The clergy, the congregation, the format of the services are blamed far more than basic message [*sic*] and basic ideas' (M-O A: FR 2556, 'Why I don't go to church', January 1948, p. 6).

> The thing that put me off was how the ladies in the choir used to argue with one another. This one had got to try to outshine that one or outshine the other. And then they decided that they would have some boys in the choir [...] And of course a lot of the women didn't want the boys in the choir [...] And one woman got up and said 'We don't want those there', she said 'they're croaking like nobody's business, they can't even sing, they can't do this, they can't do the other'. I thought 'Right, if that's what they think about me, I'm finished' and I never went again. [124]

Mrs Tudor, who occasionally attended churches and chapels in Dudley as an adult but never regularly attended any place of worship, refused ever to attend Vicar Street again following an incident at a service when 'one of the leading ladies' of the chapel marched to her pew, and pushed onto the end so that there was no room left for a lady who had already been sitting there.[125] Similarly, Mrs Childs' father never again regularly attended Mount Zion chapel in Upper Gornal after he was removed from his seat by a prominent chapel member at a Sunday School Anniversary in order to make room for somebody else, despite the time and effort he had made to prepare the chapel for the Anniversary.[126] Mr Tomlins of Lower Gornal, brought up in a Strict Baptist family, was first put off chapel by the way in which chapel members seemed to 'threaten children with God'.[127]

Criticisms often focused on what appeared to be snobbery and show about appearances. Mr Thomas's father refused to attend St Thomas's church in Dudley from 1941 after seeing a workman in overalls turned away from the church by a sidesman.[128] Mrs Clark and her daughter became disillusioned with Lake Street chapel in Lower Gornal during the 1950s when the chapel began to count among its regular attenders a number of wealthier people. Mrs Clark's daughter recalled the contrast with the poverty of her own family:

> They'd got to have the biggest hats, they'd got to have the biggest, and they'd shopped at this particular shop. And you'd think, well hang on a minute, that's got nothing to do with it. It dain't matter if you come in your carpet slippers really [...] Mum and dad always had an open house [...] and then there was a lot of bitchiness: 'Oh that's an open house, I wonder what goes on there' [...] it was blasphemy really what they were doing. Or what they were saying. That's when I decided to come out. But I've always been a strong believer.[129]

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[124] RPMSI, G1.
[125] RPMSI, D28.
[126] RPMSI, G7.
[127] RPMSI, G29.
[128] RPMSI, D27.
[129] RPMSI, G8. Mrs Clark's daughter was present during the latter stages of the interview.

When the church or chapel failed to provide a charitable and generous community, the privacy of the home could seem preferable, a haven for private beliefs, particularly with the opportunities offered by broadcast religious services. Mrs Clark added to her daughter's comments:

> It was the same at Gornal church. The moment they come out they're talking about one another. And I think, well I'd rather watch mine on the telly and there's no back-biting.[130]

Prominent members of churches and chapels who owned local businesses - as at the Zoar chapel, for example - were also sometimes suspected of using the worshipping community as a means to establish networks of customers. Such behaviour was also regarded as hypocrisy, the implication being that the churches were being used for self-advancement whilst 'true' Christianity was supposed to be concerned with serving others, particularly the poor and needy. Mr Sankey of Gornal Wood, who attended Zoar Sunday school but rarely attended any place of worship as an adult, believed he detected such behaviour when he returned to Gornal after serving in the Airforce during the Second World War:

> I found people that were running these churches, they'd always got their good businesses. But why had they got their good businesses? Because they'd talk to the people at church and the people at church used to spread it to Mrs Jones, and Mrs Jones spread it. And all that time they were spreading it out - bread and butter to them![131]

Conclusion

The widespread popular belief that Christianity was essentially a practical matter tended to shed the Gospel of much of the metaphysical emphasis with which institutional religion endowed it. The social Gospel was whittled down to the parable of the Good Samaritan and popular religion retained a doctrine of 'good works' at its heart. The emphasis on mutual assistance and charitability as the root of the Christian life was consistent with the dominant popular pelagian universalist belief about access to the rewards of heaven.

Even the evangelical minority who espoused a soteriology based around the doctrine of the Atonement, however, found themselves confronted with the difficulty of reconciling the theology which they learnt and accepted as adults with the teachings which they had accepted

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[130] RPMSI, G8.
[131] RPMSI, G2.

as children, centred as they were around practical and ethical concerns. Such was the influence of the idea of practical Christianity that in some cases the tension between faith and works was left unresolved, with inconsistent beliefs simultaneously held.

The creed of practical Christianity encompassed both regular and irregular churchgoers for a variety of reasons, though in slightly different ways. As has been shown, the near universal experience of Sunday school combined with parental authority to transmit such values from generation to generation. Whilst ordinary notions of human justice and the conditions of working-class life served to provide a context within which practical Christianity - neighbourly charity and generosity - continued to make sense for those whose adult involvement with institutional religion was minimal, working-class culture rendered some of the ethical demands of church and chapel culture less easily sustainable. Such standards were, amongst those outside the constituency of regular churchgoers, re-negotiated and accommodated to a certain extent by the adoption of separate spheres. Whilst the home should, and could, remain a place of Christian standards, monitored by female family members, the male workplace, although sometimes paying respect to those who insisted on such standards, remained somewhat impervious to their civilising effect.

If practical Christianity and living a decent and respectable life were the outward graces, the means by which an objective assessment of the Christian credentials of another person could be judged, the inward graces of popular religion, the subjective confirmation of the reality of a superempirical realm, were to be found in a variety of religious experiences, the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Popular Religious Experiences in Dudley and Gornal, 1914-65

Historians have tended to fight shy of any extended consideration of the nature and extent of religious experience. There are good reasons for caution, and any attempt to consider religious experiences historically is beset with problems. The historian attempting to identify, interpret and explain evidence of religious experience is liable to lay him- or herself open to the charge of straying beyond the bounds of his/her proper sphere into the realms of psychology.[1] There are, furthermore, obvious definitional problems which, in turn, have implications for the research methodology and for interpretation. Religious experiences are inherently subjective. It is not the business of the historian to make judgements on their authenticity or to arrive at any conclusions about their objective truth-status. But the historian, like the social scientist, must arrive at a workable definition in order to proceed, thus introducing a second tier of subjectivity.

One possibility would be to follow functionalist social theorists who have considered religious experiences in terms of a broad category of emotional tension-release, the triggers for which may or may not have any relation to religion as it is socially, rather than sociologically, understood.[2] The historian, however, tends to doubt the implied *a priori* acceptance of a constant human nature with constant needs, and is more interested in the ways in which experiences are culturally shaped and given meaning by a social context at a given time. Susan Budd notes that any connection between personality and religious belief must be mediated by the meaning of religion in any culture,[3] and the same can be said of religious experiences. It is to the socio-cultural context of religious experiences that the historian should turn in any attempt to explain the nature of such experiences rather than to individual personalities. The definition which will be adopted here, therefore, will derive from the substantive definition of religion outlined in chapter 1. Following

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[1] For criticisms of historical psychology, or 'psycho-history', see David E. Stannard, *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (Oxford, 1980).

[2] For a brief but useful survey of functionalist interpretations of religion from Durkheim onwards, see Susan Budd, *Sociologists and Religion* (1973), pp. 35-50.

[3] Budd, *Sociologists and Religion*, p. 32.

Glock and Stark, religious experience is here defined as 'some sense of contact with a supernatural agency'.[4]

Amongst the earliest of extensive attempts to explore the nature, extent and roots of religious experience in such terms were the psychological studies of Edwin Starbuck and William James published at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[5] Both Starbuck and James concentrated on the more dramatic religious experiences and defined them in terms of the patterns for individual spiritual growth established by institutional religion. Both gave considerable prominence to explorations of religious conversion, with nearly half of Starbuck's study and a quarter of James's study devoted to the phenomenon.

In so far as historians have considered religious experiences, they too have tended to devote attention to the more dramatic and life-changing. This is largely a product of the available sources. For periods beyond the reach of oral testimony, spiritual autobiographies are one of the most important of sources, and the narratives of such accounts are shaped around such pivotal moments. Williams, for example, uses such accounts to argue that there were standards and expectations within a church-based culture, recognised within, but only partially incorporated by a distinctive working-class popular culture in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Southwark.[6]

Williams' study has gone further than any other to explore popular religion on its own terms, rejecting any *a priori* assumption of the validity of institutional definitions of Christian belief and practice and questioning middle-class clerical commentators' assumptions of working-class irreligiosity. Nevertheless, whilst there are important discussions of the role of hymns in generating religious experiences, and a brief discussion of popular beliefs in ghosts, almost all of Williams' discussion of popular religion explores beliefs and rituals.

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[4] Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago, 1965), p. 41.

[5] Edwin Diller Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness* (1899); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a study in human nature* (1960).

[6] Sarah Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture: A Study of the South London Borough of Southwark c.1880-1939' (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 1993), pp. 200-30.

It is the contention of this chapter that popular religion in Dudley and the Gornals between 1914 and 1965 was characterised by a changing variety of religious experiences, working within the broad definition which has been outlined. For a minority, religious experiences were life-changing events. For many others, religious experiences were far more ephemeral, often less intense and sometimes reproducible more or less at will given an appropriate physical environment: a quiet church, a pilgrimage site or beautiful natural surroundings.

The taxonomy of religious experience outlined by Glock and Stark is adopted here as an organising framework.[7] The 'responsive experience' incorporates all those which include not only an awareness of the divine/supernatural presence, but an additional sense that the awareness is mutual and that the divine/supernatural is taking notice of the individual. The 'revelational experience' incorporates any experience which supernaturally provides information about the future, or (to extend Glock and Stark's definition) about the past. The 'confirming' experience covers both a 'generalized sense of sacredness', and a 'specific awareness of the presence of divinity'/the supernatural, both of which provide a temporary intensification of the conviction that the beliefs one holds are true.

Such a schematic outline can only provide a provisional framework, and some experiences will straddle several categories. Within these categories, the nature and extent of religious experiences will be explored together with any identifiable changes over time and influences of age, gender and class.

Responsive religious experiences

Glock and Stark provide two subdivisions of the responsive religious experience useful for an analysis of popular religion: the salvational and the miraculous. The salvational experience denotes the sense that God has chosen the individual to be amongst his own eternally, encapsulated in the experience of conversion. It will be argued here, however, that it was not only through direct contact with God that assurance of the life to come was secured. Contact with spirits of the

[7] Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, pp. 39-66.

departed also provided such assurance and will therefore be considered alongside more orthodox Christian 'salvational' responsive experiences. The miraculous experience denotes the sense that God has intervened in the physical world on behalf of the believer to effect a change impossible without His intervention.

The experience of personal conversion has been one of the central features of evangelical Christianity in England since the Methodist Revival of the eighteenth century, with its renewed emphasis on salvation through the atoning death of Christ.[8] In the traditional pattern, awareness of sin is followed by repentance and an acceptance of the salvation offered by Christ through his substitionary role as carrier of the sins of mankind. Grace was imputed to the sinner at the moment of conversion, that is to say it remained Christ's righteousness unearned and undeserved by the sinner, rather than imparted continually through a life in the church which was the High Church theology of grace.[9] In traditional evangelical theology, the experience distinguishes the saved from the unsaved.

Jeffrey Cox, drawing on the commentaries of middle-class Nonconformist clergymen in Lambeth between 1870 and 1930, traced an increasing tendency in the late nineteenth century for leading Nonconformists to accept as appropriate a gradual process of socialization of children into Christian belief, practice and behaviour and to reject the older emphasis on the need to pass through the crisis of conversion.[10] If this was the view of the clergy, however, it was not, according to Sarah

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[8] David Bebbington identifies conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism as the essential components of evangelicalism (D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989), pp. 2-17). Roland Robertson suggests a late eighteenth-century parallel between the developing emphasis on the possibility of individual rebirth and renewal through conversion and the new understanding of 'revolution' as a vehicle for social rebirth and renewal (Roland Robertson, *Meaning and Change: Explorations in the Cultural Sociology of Modern Societies* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 197-98).

[9] B.G. Worrall, *The Making of the Modern Church: Christianity in England since 1800*, rev. edn (1993), pp. 28-30. Wesley's doctrines of sanctification and perfection rendered the implications of the imputation of grace problematic for Methodists since holiness, it was argued by traditionalists like Samuel Chadwick, was imparted and the eradication of sin possible: see Ian Randell, 'Southport and Swanwick: Contrasting Movements of Methodist Spirituality in Inter-War England', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*,50 part 1 (February 1995), pp. 1-14.

[10] Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1879-1930* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 248-52. A shift towards a more gradualist view of conversion is also noted by Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 7-8.

Williams, the popular understanding of the experience of the 'true believer'. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Southwark, Williams argues, conversion and the evangelical metaphysical beliefs, the strict moral code and the institutional commitments which it entailed were felt, by the working class converted and unconverted alike, to differentiate the ideal of the 'true believer' from the less demanding Christian standards exacted within popular culture.[11] This then was perceived to be the experience of a deeply religious minority.

William James and Edwin Starbuck both argued that conversions are, as James put it, the 'result of suggestion and imitation'.[12] Research undertaken by the Evangelical Alliance in 1968, involving over 4000 interviews, on the context of conversions during the twentieth century, indicated that whilst the influence of home and family in generating conversions declined between 1899 and 1968, that of special missions and crusades and of witness outside the home increased markedly.[13] Evidence from the Black Country in the twentieth century confirms that the experience of conversion was restricted to a church-centred - or rather a chapel-centred - culture. It was also the experience of a fairly small minority. Of the 133 (mainly church-going) respondents to the author's questionnaire,[14] only 19, just over 14%, stated that conversion had been an important or very important factor in their religious development. It was in the context of the missionary appeals and of the periodic calls for public commitments characteristic of Gornal Methodism throughout the period that most conversions took place. Of the nineteen conversions amongst questionnaire respondents, twelve were experienced amongst the forty-four people in the sample who regularly attended one of the six Gornal Methodist chapels from early childhood to early adulthood, i.e. 63% of all conversions in the sample and over 27% of Gornal Methodists. All of the twelve conversions were amongst attenders at the three most enthusiastic and evangelically active chapels, Five Ways, Kent Street and Lake Street. Not one of the sixteen respondents attended any of the other three Gornal Methodist chapels. Thus, 12 out of 28, or 43% of respondents who attended Five Ways,

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[11] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 197-230.
[12] James, *Varieties*, p. 204; Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion*, pp. 52-4.
[13] Cited in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, 2nd edn. (1988), pp. 542-43.
[14] See Appendix 2 for a copy of this questionnaire.

Kent Street or Lake Street as children and young adults emphasised the importance of their own conversions. If attenders at the Gornal Methodist chapels are excluded from the sample, just 7 out of 89, less than 8%, of the sample attested to the importance of conversion in their lives. Of these seven, a further three conversions were experienced by regular attenders at other evangelical chapels in the Gornals: two from St Paul's Protestant and one from Robert Street Baptist. Of the remaining four, one was from Vicar Street Methodist chapel in Dudley, the most evangelical of the Dudley Methodist chapels, and the other three were from Anglican churches.

Whilst Gornal Methodism was most productive of conversion experiences throughout the period, it would be wrong to assume that conversions were unknown elsewhere. None of the Anglican churches in the Gornal and central Dudley were consistently evangelical,[15] and whilst missions were occasionally held with invited speakers their effect was more in the deepening of the spiritual commitment of the faithful than in producing conversions. When the Men's Group at the parish church of St Thomas's, Dudley, invited a speaker from Darlaston to speak on 'Christianity in Industry', a report in the parish magazine commented that the speaker started with 'a simple account of his own conversion, which he described as not "fashionable" nowadays'. The reporter agreed 'It certainly was unique to hear a youngish man, of probably under 30, giving his vital experience of God'.[16]

The Nonconformist churches of Dudley, however, had some successes in producing conversions through evangelism. It has been impossible to trace any records for the Baptist or Pentecostal churches in Dudley, but oral evidence and a short history of the Baptist church[17] indicate that these small churches engaged in local evangelism, resulting in some conversions, particularly in the years between the late 1940s and the early 1950s. In 1947, Reverend Hugh Butt of Priory Road Baptist church started a Fellowship of Youth meeting on Sunday afternoons with a

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[15] The gift of the living of St Francis on the Priory Estate was alternately in the hands of the Bishop of Worcester and a Department of State, resulting in drastic swings in churchmanship, and factions in the parish church council, the parish having 7 priests in 21 years (unrecorded interview with Alan Hayward, curate at St Francis's and St Christopher's in the 1950s).

[16] *St Thomas Parish Magazine, Dudley*, March 1947.

[17] *Our Goodly Heritage: Dudley Baptist Church 1772-1972* (n.p., n.d. [Dudley, 1972]). A copy of this bicentenary private publication is held at DALHS.

membership of nine, which grew to forty within two years, whilst in 1948 a tent campaign behind the church led to 'some conversions', and in 1953 a Caravan Mission with students from the London Bible College attracted one hundred children to each of its evening meetings for a week, as part of an attempt to increase the size of the Sunday School.[18]

Conversions also resulted from occasional missionary efforts involving several of the Nonconformist chapels in Dudley, such as a ten-day Black Country Mission in February 1924. At one meeting at King Street Wesleyan chapel on the Saturday evening a week into the mission, over a thousand people were present and there were reported to be at least seventy 'converts' at the meeting.[19] Speaking two weeks later in Birmingham, F.L. Wiseman claimed that 'thousands' had been converted in Black Country towns during the mission.[20] Whatever the true number of conversions, it appears to have been the last occasion in Dudley of missionary activity resulting in large-scale multiple conversions. Thereafter, written sources record only occasional conversions resulting from special missionary events organised for, or by, individual local (particularly Gornal) Methodist churches.[21]

A context of regular evangelical appeals undoubtedly helped to generate conversion experiences. Within the minority of interviewees who claimed to have undergone conversion the nature of the experience differed markedly, both in terms of its intensity and of its significance. A few described profound emotional experiences; more recounted what amounted to considered decisions followed by public avowals.

In some cases, a conversion was scarcely a 'religious experience' at all, judged according to the definition provided at the beginning of this chapter. In particular, teenagers around the age at which it was common to leave Sunday School and withdraw from institutional religious

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[18] *Our Goodly Heritage*, pp. 18-19.

[19] *DH*, 1 March 1924.

[20] *DH*, 15 March 1924. The tendency to exaggerate the number of converts is, of course, characteristic of evangelical revivals.

[21] Dudley Circuit Local Preachers' Meetings Minutes 1920-1956, September and December 1937; Priory Methodist Church, Dudley, Minute Book 1937-80, 5 February 1942; RPMSI, G21. In the twelve years extant minutes of the Quarterly Meetings of the newly amalgamated Dudley circuit (1936), the only mention of conversions was in the wake of the Cliff College mission in Gornal in 1937 (Dudley Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1936-48).

involvement were liable to find themselves pushed towards acceptance of Christ's offer and to make the public declaration of a commitment which was considered the appropriate way to declare one's decision. The Cliff College missions in Gomal in 1937 and 1948 were geared towards the conversion - or securing the commitment - of children and young adults, with special 'Sunshine corner' services for young children (talks and children's hymns) and a team of twenty young male missioners befriending the local youth - particularly girls - and encouraging them to attend the main missionary services. In April 1937 the local Methodist minister, the Reverend Dean Sherriff, sent a report of the mission for publication in the Cliff College magazine. The young were clearly the target, and future leaders were being sought for the chapels:

> The minister naturally takes a great interest in certain young people, for he knows they are typical, key-men and girls. Some of them were gloriously converted as we had hoped and prayed they would be [...] Scores of young people had come over to the Lord's side.[22]

In April 1948, the magazine again carried a report of the Gomal campaign, together with a photograph of a 'Youth Fellowship Conference' outside Lake Street chapel in Lower Gomal:

> Many children in the Sunday Schools accepted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour [...] Great numbers of young people have come into blessing and many have been won for Christ.[23]

Some young people found themselves subject to overt pressure during such special missionary campaigns. During the 1937 Cliff College campaign in Gomal, Mrs Beale, then 16 or 17 years old, was singled out by one of the mission team leaders before one of the main services. A sense of guilt and extreme self-consciousness combined with deference to her elders to produce the effect desired by the missioner. Sin and consciousness of God or Christ do not enter into the account:

> Tom Butler, he preached on the Sunday morning and when we were coming out of church there were four of us girls who were very close together and he said, 'Now, you'll come out tonight, won't you? You'll make a decision tonight' [...] and of course when he made the plea at night I felt so guilty and one of my other friends did, so two of us went out to the front [...] And then afterwards I was resenting him, I thought 'He's pushed me into this, making this open declaration' [...] When you have these people who make pleas and they keep on and on, they go on for 10 minutes - 'Now I know there's somebody who's being spoken to' - and [...] he'd said, 'Now, you'll come out tonight'. So [...] I went out.

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[22] *Joyful News*, 22 April, 1937.
[23] *Joyful News*, 22 April, 1948.

> Q. Why did you feel guilty when he was saying this?
> I think it was a lot to do with him, and there was this feeling of resentment. I think it's the way we were brought up you see, like you didn't answer back. There was always discipline you see.[24]

Conversions were most often experienced by children and young people who not only attended Sunday School throughout their childhood but also experienced the extension of the culture and expectations of the chapel into the domestic sphere.[25] Where such homes were characterised predominantly by good and harmonious family relations, the expectations of parents often shaped those of their children, and the desire to please could contribute to teenage conversions. Mrs Beale's father was an unaccredited lay preacher, Himley Road Sunday School Superintendent during her childhood, sometime Sunday School Secretary, a daily reader of the Bible and Wesley's sermons, and had, as a teenager, conducted a mission at an Independent chapel in Pensnett. Her mother was a regular member of Himley Road choir. Friends who visited the house were mostly from chapel and visiting preachers at Himley Road were sometimes invited to Sunday lunch. Whilst her conversion was far from dramatic, it did have the effect of fulfilling parental expectations:

> I never saw a great light, it's never been a road to Damascus for me. To me, mine is just a quiet comfortable faith [...] of course father and mother were very pleased.[26]

In terms of the circumstances of the conversion and the chapel-centred family environment, this case was far from unique. Mrs Mason was also converted at the Cliff mission of 1937. Her father, a carpenter, had been converted and become a trustee of Five Ways chapel before getting married; he was a Sunday School teacher and spent much time on carpentry and practical work for the chapel. Born in 1908, unmarried and still living with her parents, Mrs Mason had avoided the missionary services for some years, disliking the pressure to make a public commitment. Her conversion at the Cliff mission in 1937 was in the context of an appeal for those present to move to the front of the chapel, when she joined several others, but again there was little that could be described as a 'religious experience', nor was there much emphasis on sin, repentance and Christ's

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[24] RPMSI, G5
[25] Cf. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 7.
[26] RPMSI, G5

sacrificial death. Rather, it was a case of trying to do better what she, as a child brought up in a Methodist household was already doing, and of remaining loyal to the local church.[27] Her daughter, born in 1947, in turn went through conversion at the age of nineteen, the experience thus spanning three generations of the family.[28]

Those wishing to become Methodist local preachers were expected to give to the circuit Local Preachers' Meeting an account of their conversions and of their callings to preach. Thus, those at the most active and committed heart of lay Methodism were encouraged by institutional expectations and practices to interpret their own spiritual histories in terms of the pattern sanctioned by evangelical tradition. Nevertheless, aspiring local preachers sometimes struggled to identify a conversion experience when they had been brought up in Christian families. Mr Dickens, born in 1924 the son of a time-keeper for the Earl of Dudley, grew up in Scotts Green, Dudley and moved to Woodside when 11 years old. Although his father only occasionally attended, his mother and her parents were all members of Woodside Wesleyan chapel. He became a member at Woodside in 1939, and then a local preacher in the late 1950s, but located his 'conversion', somewhat uncertainly, to the late 1940s/early 1950s:

> Not a sudden conversion. But I should say when I was in me mid twenties [...] It was probably one of these special services when we had an evangelist in.
>
> Q. Was that a moment when you made that commitment?
> Yes, it was. But when you're brought up in it, I don't think it can be as sudden as that.
>
> Q. No conviction of sin and guilt like in Methodism of old - not like that?
> No.[29]

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[27] RPMSI, G22.

[28] Questionnaire no.13. Compare the comments of the wife of one of the Cliff College missioners in 1937 and 1948 and a regular visitor to Gornal thereafter: 'there is something very unusual about Gornal [...] There are three generations who have experienced the breath of God in the church and it has come through evangelistic missions. Three generations have proved and are still proving that Jesus is alive ever more!': Marie Butler, *They called him "Brother Tom": A Personal Biography* (Ilkeston, 1985), p. 18. I am grateful to Mrs Butler for providing me with a copy of this booklet.

[29] RPMSI, D7.

The minutes of the local preachers' meetings rarely record any details of the accounts of preachers on trial of their experiences of conversion and the calling to preach. Occasional details, however, suggest that Mr Dickens' experience was probably not untypical. In March 1940, for example, the minutes of the Dudley circuit local preachers' meeting noted of the conversion account of Caleb Wilson only that 'Brother Wilson was brought up in Christian surroundings'.[30]

Not all conversion experiences were mundane. A small minority emphasised their own sense of sin or guilt and the need for redemption, replicating more closely the understanding of conversion constructed around traditional evangelical soteriology. Some of the evidence for such experiences is drawn from accounts provided by preachers on trial to the circuit local preachers' meeting and the possibility that the requirement that aspiring local preachers provide such accounts constituted a formative influence on the shaping of spiritual autobiographies must be borne in mind.

In March 1940, Richard Marsh, a former drunkard converted during the Cliff College mission of 1937 in Gornal, described his experience in 'middle life' in terms which indicated a dramatic change of direction away from the road to damnation: his was 'a sudden and sound conversion, a brand plucked from the burning'.[31] Less dramatic, but again associating the experience with a particular moment and drawing on the language and theology of evangelical Christianity, was the testimony of Allan Jones, who attended Himley Road Sunday School in Gornal Wood until, at the age of 16, he 'felt the need of the saving Grace of Christ and at a prayer meeting gave his life to Christ'.[32] Similarly, Mrs Wesley, born in 1921, was converted in 1937 when Jo Blinco, one of the Cliff missioners, returned in November to conduct an evangelistic appeal service at Five Ways chapel: 'I went up to the front, I asked Christ into my life, asked him to forgive me for my sins'.[33]

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[30] Dudley Circuit Local Preachers' Meetings Minutes 1920-1956, March 1940. At least one parent of each of nine of the twelve converts among Gornal Methodist questionnaire respondents was a regular Methodist chapel-goer or Methodist member. Of the remaining three converts, both parents of one were regulars at Robert Street Strict Baptist chapel in Lower Gornal, both parents of another were regular Anglicans, and the parents of the other one were occasional Methodists.

[31] Dudley Circuit Local Preachers' Meetings Minutes 1920-1956, March 1940.

[32] Dudley Circuit Local Preachers' Meetings Minutes 1920-1956, June 1944.

[33] RPMSI, G30.

Mr Fletcher, born in 1939, was converted at a missionary campaign held by the local Evangelisation Committee at Kent Street, Upper Gornal, in 1953. The son of parents who had both been converted, he was, as a 14-year old, in his own words, 'a bit of a lad', but the moral teaching of Sunday School had produced a sense of his own sin and a desire for a better life. Respect for the Christian way of life of local people in the church meant that the conversionist imperative for Mr Fletcher seemed to 'ring right', and the theology of conversion provided the means to effect an appropriate self-assessment and subsequent transformation: conversion was centred on 'the feeling of a need for [...] the Saviour'.[34]

Sometimes a predisposition towards generalised feelings of guilt in interpersonal relationships combined with a theologically-defined sense of sin and guilt at Christ's death to bring about conversion within the context of involvement in evangelical Methodism. Mrs Griffin described her conversion as 'an off-loading of guilt [...] not a bolt from the blue [...] it was a dedication, and an off-loading of guilt. And a commitment to a Christian life'. The guilt was a mixture of guilt for the sin that sent Jesus to the Cross and sensitivity about how she treated other people, a sensitivity resulting from an ingrained sense of right and wrong developed during a very strict religious upbringing at a police orphanage.[35] Born in 1933, she was converted aged 16 during an ordinary service at Vicar Street chapel, Dudley, where the idea of making a commitment was constantly stressed both from the pulpit and reinforced by the presence of those who had already done so.[36]

It is clear then that, whilst many of the conversions in this period were probably little more than decisions, encouraged by evangelical appeals, to continue with greater diligence habits and practices instilled from childhood through Sunday School and parental teaching, a minority experienced conversions of a more traditional evangelical kind and interpreted their experiences in

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[34] RPMSI, G10.

[35] Dorothy Ormerod, *A Healthy and Happy Life: My eight years at the Southern Provincial Police Orphanage Redhill Surrey 1937-1945* (Cannock, 1995). I am grateful to the author for giving me a copy of this autobiographical booklet.

[36] RPMSI, D11.

such terms: sin, guilt, the need for redemption and grace, the offer of salvation available through Christ's death on the Cross and the need for the sinner to respond to the offer.

In one case, this pattern was transformed into a vivid visionary experience at the moment of conversion. Mr Hayes, born in 1935 the son of a carpenter, attended Kent Street Methodist Sunday School in Upper Gornal, where his family were firmly committed regular members and Sunday School teachers. By 1948, Mr Hayes was struggling against the constrictions of the family's regular religious practices but was 'dragged along' to the final meeting of the Cliff College campaign of 1948 in Gornal, where he attended a special meeting for children. The account of his conversion retains great emotional resonance as a pivotal moment in his life: during this meeting Mr Hayes found that the room and all his surroundings were fading from view, to be replaced by light and then a vision of Christ on the Cross, beckoning and saying, 'Come. Come to me'. The invitation was accepted later in the meeting when he publicly committed himself to Christ.[37]

In another case, asked whether she had undergone conversion, Mrs Childs, born in 1915, a lifelong Methodist in Upper Gornal, referred to a 'deepening' of her faith shortly after her mother had died in the early 1960s, resulting from a physical rather than a visual experience of Christ's presence. The account is characterised by the intimate friendship of Jesus which the whole interview revealed to be at the centre of her Christian faith:

> One experience, in Kent Street, after mom died [...], a few weeks after in chapel in choir in the front row, the Lord put his arms round me, he pushed me to the communion rail in the front. I took Nora H.... [a regular at Ruiton chapel] with me [...] I said, 'I don't know why, Nora, I had to take you but the Lord made me take you'. I said, 'Did you feel him?' and she says, 'Yes'. And we both went and knelt at the front. I told them at chapel the Lord had been in my mom's bedroom, and that he'd given me the peace that passeth all understanding, but I'd never walked to the front of the chapel but when the Lord pushed me I says to Mrs Porter, I says 'Mrs Porter, the Lord made me come and kneel and bring Nora with me'. She says, 'The Lord?' I says, 'Yes, he put his arms round me and led me to the front and he put my arm through Nora's and led me to the front' [...] I've always loved the Lord but that deepened mine [commitment].[38]

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[37] RPMSI, G13. The vision of Christ crucified has a long tradition, beginning in the eighteenth century, as part of conversion experiences within Methodism (see Henry Rack, 'Early Methodist Visions of the Trinity', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*,46 (1987), pp. 38-44).

[38] RPMSI, G7. Cf. the experiences of Salvation Army member, Mrs Homer (RPMSI, G16).

It would seem then that conversion and similar responsive experiences were typically experienced within a certain milieu. Not only did most of those claiming to have undergone conversion attend evangelical Methodist churches in the Gornals. They also came from homes which were steeped in the culture of the chapel, where parents were involved not only, in many cases, as regular chapel-goers, but also as office-holders and where the values and expectations of the chapel most profoundly affected patterns of familial interaction and relations with those outside the circle of the household. Far from being a holier-than-thou reaction to the perceived superficiality of the religion of their parents,[39] for many Gornal teenagers, particularly girls and young women during the inter-war years, to undergo conversion was a profoundly conservative act, acknowledging the social mores of the chapel and domestic culture and passing through what was tacitly acknowledged to be a rite of passage into a full adult involvement at the centre of that culture.

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that conversion experiences became less common in post-war Dudley, there is little to suggest that this was the case in Gornal.[40] Although 1948 was the last large-scale Cliff campaign, a Cliff missioner, Tom Butler, was a regular visitor to Gornal and when, in 1960, he held a campaign at Zoar Methodist church, 'almost every night, men, women and young people came forward as a sign of their surrender to Christ', whilst his visit to Five Ways in Lower Gornal in 1969 produced a scene 'like [...] a chapter out of the Acts of the Apostles' with many 'won for Christ'.[41]

Oral testimony suggests, however, that amongst certain groups, particularly young men, there was a greater tendency in the post-war years to regard conversions less as the adult continuation of childhood practices and beliefs, and more as the beginning of a living relationship with Christ, a spring-board for effecting changes in the culture of the local churches rather than staffing the continuation of the *status quo*. It was in this period that Argyle's argument - that

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[39] According to Michael Argyle, a common pattern in adolescent conversion experiences: Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion*, new edn. (1975), p. 59.

[40] Five of the twelve Gornal conversions among questionnaire respondents became teenagers in the Post-war years, two being born after the War.

[41] Butler, *They called him "Brother Tom"*, p. 17.

conversion provided a means of establishing a generational identity in opposition to earlier generations - is most applicable. Conversion was increasingly regarded as a vital part of the process by which the individual broke with the religiosity of an older generation, a sharp discontinuity with childhood experiences and a disassociation from what seemed to be the stifling and moribund religion of the parental generation. The conversion of Mr Hayes, for example, marked the beginnings of a 'living relationship' with Christ, contrasted with the dull 'religion' of dutifully accepting chapel routines:

> My own upbringing in the church, with father and mother both in Sunday School, I don't think I dared breathe, it was a very Victorian situation and consequently I felt straight-jacketed and repressed personally.[42]

The difference was partly one of gender, partly of period. Anecdotal evidence suggests that during the 1937 Cliff mission to Gomal responses to the call for commitments came predominantly from girls and young women, inspired partly by dutiful allegiance to parental norms and partly, no doubt, by the presence of a group of young men. Mrs Mason recalled the reaction of the missioner to the response to his appeal for people to accept Christ and to come out to the front to make public their commitment: 'I can remember this Lawrence saying, "But you're all lasses!"'[43]

However, the 1948 Cliff mission drew in a considerable number of young men. The experiences of War and the greater mobility of young men in the post-war period, partly resulting from the introduction of National Service, inflected conversion experiences with a different significance. Some of the 1948 converts were recently returned from the Forces, some soon to depart for National Service. It seems that at least some of the conversions of those returning from the Forces, rather than being an expression of adherence to parental norms, were born of a disaffection with the perceived irrelevance and parochial outlook of the local churches. Converts who subsequently did National Service also struggled against the same weight of conservatism:

> in 1948 a lot of the people like my brother, who'd been in the Forces but were not Christians, they'd come back into the church but were very half-hearted. They became Christians. And so

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[42] RPMSI, G13.
[43] RPMSI, G22. This impression has been confirmed in private conversations with other local people.

> they became very committed [...] just in those post-war years when things were changing [...] and they became very important and [...] some of the younger ones that got converted, did National Service after they were converted so they went into the Army as committed Christians [...] and some of them went abroad, and they came back with new ideas, had seen a bit of the world, were no longer parochial. But they were stirrers.[44]

Evidence of the influence of class in conversion experiences is far from conclusive, but is suggestive. Oral evidence suggests that converts came from respectable working-class or lower middle-class families, the same social constituency that filled many of the offices in the local chapels.[45] The managerial and professional middle classes who tended to attend Zoar, Himley Road and Mount Zion in the inter-war years were concerned with Christian standards of behaviour, whilst the majority of the middle working class and lower working class, whose attendance at chapel tended to be more occasional, had an understanding of Christianity which precluded the need for conversion. If the chapel was an arena for the potential enjoyment of authority and responsibility for upper working-class and lower middle-class Methodists in Gornal, the evangelical emphasis on conversion provided the qualification during the inter-war years. Conversion, however, tended to be accompanied by upward social mobility. Oral evidence confirms that some of the leading figures in the local Gornal churches in the post-war years who experienced conversions as young men and women went on to become, or married, successful professionals and businessmen.[46] Educated to the age of 15 or 16, some going to Grammar or High School, and a small minority

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[44] RPMSI, G18.

[45] See, for example, RPMSI, G5, G21, G22 and G23. Questionnaire respondents were asked to provide details of their fathers' occupations. The data gathered from these is very imperfect, and it proved difficult in many cases confidently to assign Registrar General classifications, so conclusions drawn from the returns need to be treated with caution. Employing the Registrar General's social classification of occupations, I to V, for 1951, the mean score for the fathers of Gornal Methodist converts was 2.86 (i.e. a marginally higher social classification than RGIII), and for the fathers of Gornal Methodist non-converts was 3.02. The difference is marginal and the number of cases is too small to be of reliable statistical significance, but fathers of converts seem generally to have been skilled working-class, had worked their way to supervisory positions, or had formed their own small businesses.

[46] e.g. Mr Hayes (RPMSI, G13), Mr Hughes and his brother (RPMSI, G18), Mrs Jones's husband (RPMSI, G19), Mrs Perry's husband (RPMSI, G23), Mrs Wesley's husband (RPMSI, G30). Gornal Methodist questionnaire respondents who had gone through conversion experiences had a mean score of 2.55 calculated from the Registrar General's classifications, as against their fathers' mean score of 2.86. Respondents who had not had conversion experiences had a mean score of 2.87, as against their fathers' mean score of 3.02.

going on to Higher Education, their discontinuity from the experiences of their parents' generation was educational, social and spiritual.

The nature and significance of conversion was also affected by changes in the emphases of local theology, particularly the greater stress on the Holy Spirit. For much of the inter-war period, the Holy Spirit remained a subject of some discomfort for older Gornal Methodists. Mr Latham, born in 1923, recalled:

> if there was a day when we used to get really scared and frightened as young people, it was on Whitsunday when somebody kept coming and talking about the Holy Spirit. We were in ignorance of these things.[47]

This was exacerbated by the establishment in 1936 of Eve Lane Pentecostal Church in Upper Gornal, attended largely by former members of Kent Street Methodist chapel in Upper Gornal and Lake Street chapel in Lower Gornal, several years after local missions by the Pentecostalist Jeffreys brothers in Dudley and the formation of a small Pentecostalist 'Bethel' in Dudley in 1932.[48] Tension between the Pentecostalists and the Methodists arose from their differing emphases on the persons of the Trinity:

> There was like thoughts around when they [the Pentecostalists] was saying, you know, "have you received the Holy Spirit?" They [the Methodists] were almost saying they wished we'd never heard of the Holy Spirit. In those days [...] it was Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus all the time.[49]

By the post-war years, the experiences of younger Gornal Methodists were less parochial. Not only did many young men go through National Service, but an increasing number of young men and women were travelling on a regular basis to such places as Cliff College for special weekends and to the Christian holiday centre at Capernwray, where they received teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit. Locally too, it was increasingly possible to receive teaching from beyond the confines of one's own church. Mr Hayes recalled of the early 1950s:

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[47] RPMSI, G21.

[48] Eva Price, 'Towards Unity: A Survey of the Growth and Development of the Churches in the Gornals' (Teacher Training Thesis, Dudley Teacher Training College, n.d. [?1962]), pp. 17-18. For the Jeffreys brothers and the origins of the Elim Pentecostal movement, see Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (1969), pp. 197-205.

[49] RPMSI, G21.

> by this time I was 16, 17, 18, when I was that age, there was a group of young Christians in the area, not from one church but drawn from several. We went out and about far more. And our elders, the leaders of our churches, never did. The only church they ever saw the inside of, was the one they'd been brought up in. We were going around to other places and we were looking at things and saying 'Why do they do that and we don't?' [...] obviously the big one was what happened at the Pentecostal churches compared to others [...]

Q. Gifts of the spirit?
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q. How did Methodist leaders deal with this?
Well in the same way. We kind of don't, we don't, you know.[50]

Many of the younger generation of local Methodists, however, tended to emphasise the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. The generation of Gornal Methodists who reached maturity after the War was far less sceptical about, and less discomfited by, the claims of Pentecostalism than was the generation which preceded it, and many had direct contact with such claims. At the very least, this tended to mean that conversion was understood more in terms of direct communion between the convert and God, as the moment at which one received the Holy Spirit. Mrs Jones, born in 1941 and brought up by her grandmother and an uncle who was a Sunday School teacher at Kent Street chapel in Upper Gornal, was converted at a missionary appeal in Wolverhampton in 1957. Sceptical of the Pentecostal theology of a separate 'baptism in the Spirit', she nevertheless accepted the reality of the Gifts of the Spirit, but stated her belief that the Holy Spirit is received at the moment of conversion:

> when you are converted you do receive the Holy Spirit [...] so I don't think later on it's a question of receiving the Holy Spirit. I think the Holy Spirit is there when you are converted.[51]

Those who were most fully persuaded of the reality of contemporary Pentecostal experiences - some of whom remained in their own Methodist churches - interpreted their experiences in even more supernaturalist terms. Mr Hayes' visionary conversion experience during the 1948 Cliff campaign was preceded by a second-hand account of events in the crypt of St Paul's Protestant church in Lower Gornal the night before the service at which he was converted. During a night of

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[50] RPMSI, G13.
[51] RPMSI, G19

fervent and zealous prayer in the crypt, he was later told, the Cliff missioners and a few local Methodists who were with them were 'floored', i.e. overcome as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Others outside the church were reportedly convinced that the church was on fire and called the fire brigade,[52] whilst attempts to enter the crypt during the night were foiled by a door which was apparently locked but which, it was later found, had never been locked at all. All of these events were interpreted by Mr Hayes as evidence that God had taken active control in order to effect the work of the Holy Spirit, work which carried through with intensity into the following evening when Mr Hayes had his conversion experience.

A growing emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, inspired partly by Pentecostalist teachings, thus contributed to the changing nature of conversion experiences and their interpretation by the post-war years. The full theology of Pentecostalism was the enthusiasm of a small minority. To many it was unsettling and Eve Lane Pentecostal church in Upper Gornal continued to be looked upon with some suspicion. The circulation of gossip served to reinforce the belief that what happened at Eve Lane was confusing, excluding and un-Christian. A local tale, perhaps apocryphal, illustrates the common suspicion of Pentecostal religious experiences. Taken aside by a member of Himley Road Methodists, the narrator was told that at Himley Road,

> "they hadn't been infected by what had been a 'gooin' on up the top end! [...] Speakin' in them there tongues [...] French, Gairman, Eyetalian ... everythin'! [...] Folks jumpin' up an' speakin' in these 'ere tongues, an' then another 'ull jump up an tell them as doe understand just what they one speakin' in tongues was on about [...] it gets everybody all mixed up. I conna understand why the good Lord corn't talk plain Gornal language in the fust place. 'E knows as moost on we ain't scholards".[53]

Yet Pentecostalism's greatest attraction for many of those who were persuaded of its authenticity consisted precisely in the possibility of receiving the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit,

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[52] Another account of this event - again second-hand - stated that bystanders saw a shining cross above the church (RPMSI, G30). There were no accounts of this event from any non-church-goers.

[53] Jim William Jones, 'Gornal Tongues and Legends', *The Black Countryman*, 23 No.3 (Summer 1990), pp. 31-5. In fact, as David Martin argues, the gifts of the Spirit, and particularly speaking in tongues, tends towards a spiritual, rather than an intellectual, elitism: David Martin, *The Breaking of the Image: A Sociology of Christian Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1980), p. 199.

religious experiences of the 'responsive' type. The most intense of such experiences often occurred at the moment described as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, an experience separate from, and subsequent to, conversion. Mrs Fletcher, born in the early 1940s into a family which had moved from Lake Street Methodists to Eve Lane Pentecostal church, was baptised in the Spirit at the age of 16 and enjoyed the authenticating sign of the experience, the ecstatic speaking in tongues.[54] Mr Hayes, six years after his visionary conversion experience, occasionally attended services at Salop Street Pentecostal church in Dudley with a group of friends. At one such service he was baptised in the Spirit, with physically dramatic effects, though no speaking in tongues: 'it was like a lightning conductor [makes whizzing noise]. You know, straight in, fall over'.[55]

It is difficult to interpret, and impossible to estimate the frequency of, such intense religious experiences. The growth of the Pentecostal churches in the twentieth century is a well-documented phenomenon, but it has generally been presumed that the theology of Pentecostalism has remained the preserve of those within the Pentecostalist churches, its attractions confined to the socially or economically deprived.[56] In Dudley and Gornal, however, the increasing emphasis in the post-war years on the discernible work of the Holy Spirit was not wholly confined to the Pentecostal churches in Eve Lane and Salop Street, nor to the socially or economically deprived. A younger generation, less inclined to accept the theological (and general) authority of their elders, more widely travelled and more inclined to sample for themselves the offerings of a variety of denominations, was more attracted by such teachings, although not always, as a result, moving away permanently from their parents' churches. For those with Pentecostal theological leanings, the

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[54] RPMSI, G10. S. Bradley, of Eve Lane Pentecostal church, Upper Gornal, wrote two short articles arguing that speaking in tongues was the only authentic initial evidence of baptism in the Spirit: *The Messenger*, March and April 1969.

[55] RPMSI, G13.

[56] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Harmondsworth, 1966), pp. 54, 224; Roland Robertson, *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion* (Oxford, 1970), p. 169; Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, p. 245.

new emphasis affected the nature and interpretation of religious experiences and also almost certainly - though this is impossible to demonstrate from the available evidence - their frequency.[57]

Belief in the agency of an evil spirit was restricted to a small minority both inside and outside the constituency of regular churchgoers. Experiences of evil were even more rare, though not unknown, and experiences of evil of the responsive type were rarer still. The only example of an old-fashioned exorcism of evil spirits is from a second-hand account, provided by Mr Hudson, a member of St Paul's Protestant church in Lower Gornal, from just after the end of our period. The reported surprise of Reverend Allan Fisher, minister of the Gornal and Sedgley Methodist circuit in the late 1960s, suggests the rarity of such occurrences:

> There was a couple in the Straits when Mr Fisher was the Methodist minister. He was called to exorcise the house. He went down and he'd never had an experience like it [...] and he said he'd never encountered anything like it. The place was possessed with evil spirits.[58]

For those who were brought up in families steeped in a religious culture, or who were heavily involved in church life as children and adolescents, theological knowledge could profoundly shape deeply personal experiences which may well have been (and in one case was interpreted retrospectively by the interviewee as) the product of the physical and emotional changes of adolescence. Mr Griffin recalled two diabolic experiences from his youth. The first - a terrifying schoolboy experience of 'something evil coming into the toilet' - he interpreted at the time as the presence of a 'devil spirit'. The second experience, a vividly recalled dream, was explained retrospectively by Mr Griffin, in terms which reflect an extensive subsequent education, as 'a dream of puberty or sexual awakening':

> the devil was tormenting me and telling me that there was no God and no heaven and all this and I was really frantic and almost believing. And the devil was dragging me down into the depths of unbelief and suddenly I felt a great sense of relief and in this very vivid dream I turned and my

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[57] It is important to stress these changes, since they lay open to question the dismissal of Pentecostalism as a purely sectarian response to secularisation. They suggest the possibility that under certain conditions, rather than experiencing a steady movement away from supernaturalism, the older churches and their members may experience a movement back towards supernaturalism.

[58] RPMSI, G17. The only other account of an exorcism was provided by Mrs Richards, a Wren's Nest Estate resident, who sensed a spirit presence in a pub on the Estate during the late 1950s or early 1960s and then in her own home; she invited the vicar to come to her house to rid it of the presence.

> hand was underneath the pillow and holding the Bible and this brought deliverance [...] I felt the doubt and the terror very real, and I felt the sense of deliverance very real as well.[59]

Childhood and adolescent knowledge about the devil, particularly for those, like Mr Griffin brought up in Church of England Sunday Schools, centred on the period of Lent. Hence, the devil as an active force seeking to tempt the believer away from the path of righteousness and to reject God's will remained for some, at least during youth, a powerful image.

Temptation to do wrong was mentioned by several interviewees - mainly those within the constituency of regular churchgoers - as evidence of the work of the devil. Temptation could take the form of the positive attractions of the flesh and the material world, or the negative attractions of giving up the pursuit of that which seemed difficult. In all but one case, however, such temptations were through normal and mundane channels and were not, in the sense discussed here, religious experiences. The two exceptions were both recounted by lifelong regular churchgoers. Mrs Griffin, strictly brought up as a child in the Church of England, became a Methodist in her late teens and wished as a young adult to become a deaconess in the Methodist church:

> I remember in my bedroom I was praying, [and] actually seemed to have a vocal sort of temptation to give it up, it was like a voice - "Give this up!" - like a little voice inside [...] It was the only time I felt as though it was the devil speaking to me.[60]

Mr Hudson, born in 1920, and an adult attender at St Paul's Protestant, was separated from his mother in infancy but found himself with the opportunity of being reunited at the age of thirty-five. Reunion with his mother was, he believes, God's will, both as a familial duty and because he would become the agent of her conversion. A vocal temptation, however, was put in his way:

> Now the amazing thing was - and you may not believe this - the Enemy of my soul said, 'You've never known your mother, have nothing to do with it'.[61]

Such apparently rare experiences, whilst clearly shaped by Christian teaching, were personal and private.

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[59] RPMSI, D11. Both of these experiences were recounted during the interview with Mr Griffin's wife.
[60] RPMSI, D11.
[61] RPMSI, G17.

The private domain of the adolescent - or adult - psyche was not, however, the only location for the interpretation of experiences in diabolical terms. The Devil continued to feature in the moral order of folk religion, as a sanction against certain undesirable forms of behaviour. Belief in the Devil was regarded retrospectively by many interviewees with some amusement as something of a convenient fiction which parents could employ to control their children. Nevertheless, there is evidence that an oral tradition of *experiences* of the Devil helped to sustain some belief in a devil whom one risked encountering should one fail to shun certain forms of behaviour. Again, personal encounters were rare, and the few accounts provided by interviewees were second-hand. Moreover, the fact that this oral tradition linked the devil's appearance with activities which were regarded by the general population and, latterly by most of those within the churches as well, with increasing leniency - Sabbath breaking, gambling, card-playing, drinking - probably explains why such second-hand accounts largely drew on the tales of the parental generation.

Mrs Carter, born in 1935 recalled a tale told by her mother, of the time before the former was born when her father used to play cards on a Sunday with a group of men in 'a certain empty old house' in Cross Street, Dudley. Neither parent was a regular churchgoer, but the sinfulness of card-playing, and particularly playing on a Sunday, was felt acutely and considered likely to bring on undesirable consequences:

> Mother did not used to like it and her used to say to 'em, "You're here again playing cards on Sunday. you should not be doing that, it's wrong. You'll have the Devil at you". And they took no notice [...] and they was all running out of this old house one night, and when me father like got in the house he looked ever so white and her said, "What's the matter?", and he says, "Oh", he says, "I'm sure there was a devil or summat what come down that chimney when we was playing cards [...] I'm sure it was the devil" [...] And she said, "I told you about playing cards, you lot, in that old house". And he says, "No more". And none of them dain't go back in that house and play cards on a Sunday night.[62]

Few adults during the period under review had such experiences. The oral tradition relating morally dubious activities to appearances of the devil, however, retained a place in the folklore of some children. Mr Fletcher, born in 1939 in Upper Gornal, recalled some childhood friends:

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[62] RPMSI, D4.

> I mixed with some kids remember that I played with that had some very peculiar ideas, you know they saw the devil on the window-sill when they played cards and that.[63]

That such ideas seemed 'peculiar' to the young Mr Fletcher, brought up in a strong Methodist family and a regular at both Kent Street and Lake Street Methodist churches, suggests that these beliefs were part of a popular tradition - probably largely now restricted to children - which was excluded from the lay, as well as the official, theology of the evangelical churches of Gornal Methodism (and possibly of all churches).

If regular churchgoers were a minority in Dudley and Gornal between 1914 and 1965, those who would recount religious experiences in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit, or of the active intervention of a malign spirit, were an even smaller minority. Thus, the conversionary experiences and most of the other supernatural 'responsive' religious experiences discussed so far could only be considered part of 'popular religion' in a broad sense: the appropriation and interpretation of institutional theology by the laity within, as well as outside, the churches, rather than a 'popular religion' embedded in popular culture and distinct from institutional religion.[64] Indeed, if the ideal of conversion and the authenticity of the workings of the Holy Spirit were regarded by those outside a core of committed evangelicals and charismatics with some suspicion, even with hostility, experiences of the devil or of a malign spirit were, paradoxically, considered less threatening and, although the preserve of a small minority of the sample, were not so clearly restricted to an evangelical core. Indeed, the existence of an oral tradition connecting morally dubious behaviour with the presence of an evil spirit provided a sanction for some continued belief in a personal Devil within popular religiosity.

More widely and popularly accepted, though frequently neglected by modern historians concerned with popular religion, was a belief in the possibility of contact with the spirits of the departed. Such experiences constituted an important part of the spiritual experiences of many people in Dudley and Gornal between 1914 and 1965. Since they almost invariably involved

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[63] RPMSI, G10.
[64] Cf. Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture'.

communication between the living and the dead, they will be considered as an example of 'responsive' religious experiences.

The continued tendency of modern historians to remain within the confines of institutional religion has left the subject of spiritualism curiously under-researched. Even those who have ventured into the field of popular religion have tended to omit any sustained exploration of the subject, preferring to focus rather on popular understandings and interpretations of the relationship between man and God. Early modernists, by contrast, have identified the belief in ghosts and spirits as a feature of popular religiosity.[65] Keith Thomas concluded, however, that the belief in ghosts declined during the early modern period. According to Thomas, by the late seventeenth century a combination of social trends diminished 'the social function of the belief in ghosts', trends which have continued into the modern period: the frequency with which people live out their full life-span, thus leaving behind little 'social vacuum'; and, in particular, the modern tendency for each new generation to disengage itself from the presumed wishes of earlier generations.[66]

Modern historians have compartmentalized the issue of spirits and ghosts within studies of the rise and decline of institutional Spiritualism, in the ascendant in the later stages of, and the years immediately following, the First World War but tailing off thereafter.[67] The history of institutional Spiritualism seems to confirm Thomas's argument, drawing as it did on mass experiences of premature death and the resultant mourning. In so far as they have been considered as a feature of a broader popular religiosity, the focus has been in the rural context and the mid-nineteenth century.[68] Belief in, and experience of, ghosts and spirits in the late nineteenth and

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[65] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 701-34; Barry Reay, 'Popular Religion', in Barry Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (1985), pp. 91-128 (p. 115); John Rule, 'Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800-1850', in Robert D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Customs in Nineteenth-Century England* (1982), pp. 48-70 (pp. 62-3).

[66] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 723-24.

[67] David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in Joachim Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (1981), pp. 187-242 (pp. 227-34); J.M. Winter, 'Spiritualism and the First World War', in R. W. Davis and R. J. Helmstadter (eds.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (1992), pp. 185-200; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 54-77; A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (1978), p. 179. For the earlier history of Spiritualism, see L. Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and the English Plebeians 1850-1910* (1986).

[68] James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976), p. 282.

twentieth centuries, and particularly in the urban context have not been accorded the same attention. Studies sensitive to the issue of popular religion include consideration of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century folk appropriations of church rituals in Oldham and Saddleworth, Bermondsey, Lambeth and Staithes (North Yorkshire), but they either omit any consideration of belief or disbelief in ghosts or accept that such beliefs were in decline.[69] Edward Bailey, in a succinct summary of the traits of contemporary 'folk' religion omits any reference to contact with spirits of the dead.[70] Sarah Williams cites a case showing popular fascination with the appearance of ghosts in Southwark in the 1860s and Richard Trainor noted the prevalence of a similar fascination in West Bromwich in the 1880s, but their discussions are brief and their evidence anecdotal.[71]

A study of beliefs among the Forces carried out in the First World War noted some popular belief in Spiritualism at the beginning of our period.[72] Research carried out by Mass-Observation in the 1940s and by Geoffrey Gorer in the 1950s suggests that beliefs in the possibility of communication with spirits of the departed survived well into the twentieth century. A Mass-Observation report of 1940 commented that some belief in Spiritualism had become 'a major influence, both as a vague belief infiltrating among mass ideas; and also as a form of organised religion, with a hold on all classes'.[73] A further report of 1942 found that thirty per cent of people had either had direct experience of a ghost or knew friends who had, whilst thirty-six per cent of the

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[69] Mark Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford, 1994); Alan Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey, 1880-1939' (PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1987); Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1879-1930* (Oxford, 1982); David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982).

[70] Edward Bailey, 'The Folk Religion of the English People', in Paul Badham (ed.), *Religion, State, and Society in Modern Britain* (Lampeter, 1989), pp.145-58.

[71] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 151-52; R. H. Trainor, 'Authority and Social Structure in an Industrialised Area: A study of three Black Country Towns 1840-1890' (Oxford University, D.Phil. thesis, 1981), p. 190, cited in Williams, 'Religious Belief', p. 152.

[72] D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1919), pp. 19-20.

[73] M-O A: FR 75, 'Belief in a Future Life', April 1940.

Mass-Observation national panel members admitted to believing in ghosts. Five years later only forty per cent of panel members firmly rejected any belief in ghosts.[74]

In the early 1950s, Geoffrey Gorer revealed a lower, but still significant, level of belief in, and experience of, ghosts. One in six claimed to believe in ghosts. A further one in four were uncertain, of whom ten per cent had acquaintances whom they believed to have seen or heard a ghost. In the whole of Gorer's national sample of 5,000 people, 351 (7%) claimed to have experienced contact with a ghost.[75] A survey by the British Institute of Public Opinion in 1950 revealed even lower levels of belief and experience of ghosts. Only 8% of men and 12% of women firmly believed in ghosts. Just 2% of men and 3% of women had experienced them.[76]

The evidence presented by Mass-Observation and Gorer, whilst suggesting that beliefs in and experiences of ghosts were restricted to a minority, attests to their survival well into the twentieth century. The work of Gillian Bennett among the inhabitants of a Manchester suburb in the early 1980s shows high levels of belief in, and experience of, ghosts beyond the end of our period. Bennett conducted 120 interviews, almost all with women, introducing important linguistic distinctions to elicit more nuanced responses from her subjects. She found, for example, that the word 'ghost' was associated with traditional folkloristic images - haunted houses, Grey Ladies, etc. - and tended to produce scepticism. The possibility of the return of the departed spirits of loved ones, however, was believed in, either firmly or uncertainly, by 70% of her sample.[77] The marked differences in responses when the terminological distinctions were introduced suggests that the findings of Mass-Observation and Gorer may well have resulted in a considerable underestimate of the levels of such belief and experience in the 1940s and 1950s.

By the beginning of our period, there is little evidence in the Black Country of the sort of mass interest in legendary ghosts identified in West Bromwich by Trainor and Williams in

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[74] M-O A: FR1315, 'Report on Death and the Supernatural', 18 June 1942, p. 5 and M-O A: 'The Supernatural', *Bulletin*, New Series 5, January 1947, p. 1.

[75] Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955), p. 263.

[76] Cited in *ibid.*, fn. 22, p. 276.

[77] Gillian Bennett, 'Aspects of Supernatural Belief, Memorate and Legend in a Contemporary Urban Environment' (Sheffield University, PhD thesis, 1985), pp. 221 and 264-65. See also Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today* (1987).

Southwark in the late nineteenth century. There was undoubtedly a traditional folklore of local ghosts, with many tales of periodic appearances relating to specific places. Such tales were collected by late nineteenth-century folklorists, and many were culled from earlier written sources rather than from contemporary oral testimony.[78] Tales of the appearance of ghosts associated with particular places continued to circulate well beyond the end of our period, but there is no record of such accounts ever attracting large numbers of local people to the location of the supposed spirit. Indeed, such tales were often affectedly whimsical and many, associated with public houses for example, seem to have an eye to the profit which might accrue from the colourful connotations of a local ghost story.[79]

Local tradition attributed to miners, faced by the particular dangers of their occupation, the greatest propensity for superstition. 'Gabriel's Hounds', heard only by miners, were said to howl prior to a pit-fall, the ghosts of miners killed down the pits were believed to haunt the pit until their funerals and to continue haunting the pit if anything had been stolen from their dead bodies, whilst 'wise men' were called upon to exorcise such spirits.[80] In August 1916, a reporter in the local press, noting that the colliers were working on Bank Holiday Monday, a traditional day of rest, listed a number of old - and, he believed, now largely defunct - miners' superstitions, including the howling of Gabriel's Hounds and the practice of the laying of ghosts by means of a Bible and a key in the right hand accompanied by the recital of the Lord's Prayer.[81] Whilst ex-miners are under-represented in the interview sample, several wives and children of miners were interviewed and few had any recollections of their husbands or fathers telling them of such experiences. Only one, born

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78 G.T. Lawley, *Staffordshire, Customs, Superstitions and Folklore* (Bilston, n.d. [?1922]); F.W. Hackwood, *Staffordshire Customs, Superstitions and Folklore* (Wakefield, 1974); F.W. Hackwood, *Sedgley Researches* (Sedgley, 1898); C.H. Poole, *The Customs, Superstitions and Legends of the County of Stafford* (n.d. [c.1875]). Local twentieth-century folkloristic work has simply reproduced the earlier work, failing to identify any later living tradition of belief in communication with the spirits of the dead, e.g. Jon Raven, *Black Country & Staffordshire Stories, Customs, Superstitions, Tales, Legends & Folklore* (Wolverhampton, 1986), pp. 3-14; Jon Raven, *The Folklore of Staffordshire* (1978).

79 e.g. *BCB*, February 1981, January 1982, October 1983, December 1986; *DH*, 18 April 1953, 9 March 1957 and 3 August 1957.

80 Raven, *Black Country & Staffordshire Storie*, pp. 3-11.

81 *DH*, 19 August, 1916.

in 1915, recalled either her father or her uncle, both of whom worked down a Gornal pit as boys, giving an account of accident victims haunting the mines but also, in this case, doubling up as the omen of an accident:

> Yes, Dad said they walked the pit shafts. My dad, I do believe he saw one, he said, he only worked down the pit as a lad but whether it was dad or uncle Will [...] that said one come as he was down the pit, and he said, 'Joe he's got his head under his arm', and me dad said, 'Are you sure?' and he said 'Ahh'. And me dad said, 'Our Will, that's an omen, so listen', and my dad always said they heard a rumbling before a fall.[82]

This incident took place before the beginning of our period, in the late nineteenth century. There continued to exist throughout the period, nevertheless, some belief in - though very little experience of - the ghosts of old folklore. An oral tradition sustained some willingness to entertain a degree of belief, although the tradition appears to have been more a part of a popular construction of the identity of localities, than evidence of widespread ghostly experiences. The responses of interviewees were brief and formulaic and based on local traditions, orally transmitted, rather than personal experience.[83]

The supernatural realm continued to exert sufficient fascination for many to fall short of total scepticism about the traditional ghost, but personal sightings or sensings of such spirits were rare. However, experiences of what Gillian Bennett termed the 'revenant', the spirit of a departed loved one, were far from rare. The evidence of oral testimony from the Black Country confirms that the tradition which Bennett identified in a Manchester suburb in the early 1980s was an important strand of continuity throughout the period 1914-1965 in Dudley and the Gornals.

Rejection of, or scepticism about, the idea of an afterlife were rationalised by some interviewees by the insistence that nobody has ever come back to tell us. Amongst many interviewees, the contrary was considered to be the case: contact with the world of spirits - sometimes divine but usually spirits of the departed - underpinned faith in a life to come.

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[82] RPMSI, G7
[83] c.g. RPMSI, G6, G12 and G7.

Christian Spiritualism offered one avenue of communication with the dead.[84] A visit to King Street Congregational chapel in 1916 by the academic and eminent Spiritualist Oliver Lodge attracted an enthusiastic audience of over twelve hundred.[85] A local newspaper carried advertisements in 1918 for a Spiritualist church in the nearby town of Netherton.[86] By 1927 a Christian Spiritualist church was meeting each Sunday night in Wolverhampton Street schools in Dudley where a 'good congregation' enjoyed clairvoyant descriptions and messages from spirit friends, together with hymns, the doxology and Psalms.[87] Reports of Spiritualist meetings thereafter disappear from the press until 1959 when an obituary for the founder of St John's Christian Spiritualist church in Queen's Cross, Dudley, assigns the foundation date to 1940.[88]

Experiences of contact with the dead through Spiritualist meetings featured only occasionally in oral testimony. The mother of Mrs Carter, who lived in Dock Lane near to the Wolverhampton Street schools, attended Spiritualist meetings in Dudley in the 1920s, before Mrs Carter was born, reportedly with the hope of contacting dead family members. She had lost both her father and her brother during the First World War.[89] The effect of Christian Spiritualist meetings, however, was not always comforting for members of the congregation. Mrs Richards, born in 1941 on the Wren's Nest Estate, attended Sunday School at the local Anglican mission church of St Christopher from age 5, but then attended St John's Christian Spiritualist church between the ages of about ten and twenty when her mother obtained a job as a caretaker there. She stopped attending, due not to disbelief, but to the unsettling effect of the services:

> In the end it scared me, and I didn't go any more. Because I was in the congregation one night and I was right at the back and the minister was having visions of people who'd passed on, and having messages. And she chose me, and it scared me. She chose me because she said she'd got

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[84] Records of institutional Spiritualism in Dudley are few.

[85] *DH*, 18 November 1916. For a brief account of Lodge's importance in the spread of Spiritualism, see David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', pp. 229-30. For Spiritualism as one among a broader range of responses to death during the First World War, see Wilkinson, *Church of England and the First World War*, chapter 8 (pp. 169-96).

[86] *DH*, 28 September 1918.

[87] *DH*, 29 January, 27 August and 17 December 1927, 19 January 1929.

[88] *DH*, 27 March 1959.

[89] RPMSI, D4.

> someone. But she did describe - it was my nan - she did describe my nan properly and what I used to do for her, you know.[90]

Similarly, Miss Haywood, a lifelong Methodist, born in Dudley in 1923, attended a Spiritualist meeting with a friend in Birmingham in 1961 and although sceptical about claims to contact 'the other side' found herself unsettled by the experience:

> this woman [the medium] started, asked if any one in audience had lost someone recently. She looked at me, and he [the friend] said, 'She means you, she means you'. I said I haven't got anybody who died recently by that name, you know. I was [...] completely sceptical until at a certain point her voice changed to a man's because she was being a medium for a man who wanted to talk through her. And this message was for somebody in the congregation and she acknowledged that it was, yes, that was her brother's voice. And it did quite frighten me.[91]

Like the women in Bennett's sample, who were almost all Methodists, Miss Haywood felt that it was wrong to try to summon the spirits of the dead: 'I don't think we're supposed to. I don't think you're supposed to try and get in touch with people'.[92]

The more positive legacy of contact with Spiritualism was, for some, the sense that the spirits of loved ones remained continually close. Mrs Jeavons, born in 1933 on the Priory Estate, lost first her father then a dearly loved uncle before she reached the age of twenty. The death of her uncle, a regular attender at St Matthew's Tividale, but Spiritualist in his beliefs about the afterlife, marked the beginnings of an experiential aspect of her religious life and a generally more spiritual outlook on life which would eventually bring her back into a full adult involvement at St Francis's church in the mid-1960s:

> I turned the a corner when this uncle died, in 1950. He was keen on spiritualism [...] He said, 'When I have gone I will still be here. Any time you are in trouble, tell me, when I have gone, and I will be there'. I said, 'I will try'. When he died, I did not feel unhappy but my mother was distraught. I think he gave me - at that time - he gave me a real gift. I have since then felt that any friend who has died, I have never felt that I have lost them.[93]

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[90] RPMSI, D23.
[91] RPMSI, D17.
[92] RPMSI, D17.
[93] RPMSI, D20.

It was often in the intimacy of the family setting, and amongst those on or beyond the fringes of the churches, as well as those more regularly involved with institutional religion, that experiences of the superempirical realm were most acutely recalled. Here an oral tradition of contemporary, rather than antiquarian, folklore was drawn upon alongside, or in place of, orthodox Christian tradition.

The death bed as a site of religious significance has a long history sanctioned by the teachings of institutional orthodoxy.[94] The last words of the dying were held to be of great significance, but to witness death bed experiences - and in some cases share in some way in them - was also a significant religious experience of the 'responsive' type, and sometimes a constituent in belief in an afterlife, even providing an important underpinning to one's whole faith. Asked whether she had experienced conversion or whether her faith had been a matter of gradual growth, Mrs Homer, a Salvation Army member in Upper Gomal, identified as one of the crucial influences witnessing her grandmother's death-bed experience:

> when Grandma was dying and she said 'Oh, you've come for me, come on Jesus, I'm ready'. And she went. You see, I've had the influence.[95]

A similar experience was recounted by Mrs Childs, a lifelong Methodist from Upper Gomal. She recalled attending her mother's deathbed in the early 1960s, adopting a quieter tone and more measured pace of narrative that indicated the emotional intensity and the spiritual significance attributed to the event:

> When our Lord came into the bedroom to me mum, we couldn't see him, but we knew, we could feel his presence there, and his warmth, the warmth of him came and as though he put his arms around me [...] You've got to have it to know what it's like.[96]

It might be expected that amongst regular churchgoers, any deathbed experience would be most likely to take the form of a vision of Christ, as in these two examples. But the deathbed was more

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[94] Jacqueline D.S. Williams, 'Death in Methodism, 1780-1880', (University of Wolverhampton, M.A. thesis, 1995).
[95] RPMSI, G16.
[96] RPMSI, G7.

commonly visited by the spirits of departed family members, or else the living were visited by the recently departed, and again this was common both to many with strong and regular formal associations with the church and to those without. Mrs Clark, an irregular adult attender at Lake Street chapel, recalled the deathbed visions of her father in 1964:

> Me dad when he was dying he kept looking up at the corner and he said 'That's your mother and your gran. Your granny's up there, but they won't let me go through though'. Well, of course, he'd always been religious me dad [...] It's hard but I always think the others will be waiting for me. All of them, all them what have gone on before [...] that's what keeps your faith, isn't it?[97]

In a number of cases, interviewees recounted experiences of contact with spirits solely in the last twenty years or so, and it is difficult to ascertain with confidence the extent to which belief in the possibility of such experiences extended back before the mid-1960s, but it is clear that for some such experiences importantly underpin a lifelong belief in the afterlife. Mrs Tudor, born in Dudley in 1918 and an irregular adult churchgoer, revealed that in recent years, since her husband had died, she had felt his presence in the bedroom with her when she had been lying alone. Asked whether she had always believed in the possibility of loved ones coming back to us, she replied that such belief was a necessary part of a belief in the afterlife.[98]

Contact with the spirits of the dead was also experienced by, and was important in, the religious faith of, regular churchgoers. Mrs Hill, a lifelong Dudley Methodist, confirmed that she believed in an afterlife through reference to contact with the spirits of family members. She related how the spirit of her husband, who died a few years ago, had returned one night to help her to resolve a dilemma and concluded 'so I do really believe'. This was not, however, her first experience of such spiritual contact. Her son died in 1964, aged 12:

> Just after he died I was in chapel and they had the hymn that he had when they had his funeral. And I saw my mother's face, and I saw her change and I thought 'Oh I can't stand here and sing this' and this little, I felt like a little tug at my side and he said 'Mum, it's all right you stop there because I'm here'. And I was able to stay. So I do believe in things like that.
>
> Q. Did that confirm what you'd always believed, that there is something afterwards?

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[97] RPMSI, G8.
[98] RPMSI, D28.

> Well, yes, because I'd often thought that I'd seen my dad. And I hadn't been well [as a child] and I'd looked up and I'd seen him at the bottom of me bed, you know, willing me to get better like.[99]

All of these experiences, she insisted, had served to strengthen her faith. Similarly, Mrs Childs, a lifelong Gornal Methodist, recalled her experience soon after her father died in 1935 when she was nineteen:

> When they were buried I thought, I always thought the spirit walks with us. After he died in the front bedroom, I went in one Sunday and he spoke to me in the front bedroom. When I come out me mum said 'Who was you talking to our Rose?' I said 'My dad was in the bedroom talking to me' [...] I said to me mum, 'Our mum, me dad's here, with us all the time'. I says it's only a sleep, he went to sleep he's here all the while [...] and mum says 'We know that now then' and said 'we'll be all right now'.
>
> Q. Did contact with your dad confirm or change what you had believed before?
> I think it made me more sure.[100]

Mrs Homer, a Salvation Army member born in 1916, was reassured as a young woman by the spirit of a friend, who returned specifically to confirm the reality of the afterlife:

> When an old lady died, she was still working [for the Salvation Army] at 80, collecting and that, first time I went down to clean the Army when I was a lot younger, she'd died and I heard this rustling on the platform and I just said, 'It's all right Mrs Price, I know you're there. I can recognise you there'. Because I knew her faith and I knew that if it was possible she would let me know.

Later, when her husband died, some nineteen years after the end of our period, she experienced an intense sense of his presence several consecutive nights. He had been very ill prior to his death and had become abusive and violent, putting an almost intolerable strain on their relationship. His spiritual return, described in an account which is profoundly moving in its intimacy, provided the resolution:

> This one night, after he'd been dead a few weeks I went to sleep in the room he'd been sleeping in [...] For 2 or 3 nights, oh it was terrible, it was as if there was an earthquake [...] my bed was shaking, shaking, shaking. I used to feel the pressure of lips and I often thought that can only be George, so I moved the bed from where he'd been sleeping into the corner facing the airing

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[99] RPMSI, D14.
[100] RPMSI, G7.

> cupboard. About 3a.m. I woke up and sat up in bed [...] and I was sitting there thinking and out of the airing cupboard there came this shape and it was either a cloud or a white rose. But the whiteness, I've never seen whiteness like it. It was just as if there was a light inside it and all it had got was these shapes, and a ring and two eyes, no mouth, no nose, and the eyes glowed. I knew it was him, it come floating towards to me, and as it come towards me one of these - like a petally thing touched my lips, and I said, 'I believe you love me now'. And he floated back, and as he floated back, I thought 'He's gone to the divide'.[101]

Belief in, and experience of, spirits from beyond the grave demonstrate a vibrant twentieth-century folk tradition, by which is meant an oral tradition which shapes and makes sense of experiences, rather than the sorts of quaint survivals which are often associated with the term. Belief in the visits of spirits had no official sanction for most of those who experienced them and who were not associated with the Spiritualist churches. It has been argued that such experiences of spiritual contact with the dead took place most often in the domestic context, a context of privacy which may appear to preclude the oral transmission of accounts of such experiences. They were, however, talked about within families, between families, and with neighbours. Mrs Hammond recalled an incident well after the end of our period which reinforced her earlier belief in communication with the dead:

> my brother, he always used to phone me up on my birthday. Well, the first birthday after he died I had a bouquet of flowers come and it was from his second wife [...] So I phoned her up and said, 'I want to thank you for my flowers. How did you remember?'. She said, 'I didn't send them', she said, 'Bill sent them'. I said 'What do you mean?' She said 'Well, I didn't know it was your birthday', her says, 'but I went into the spare room and opened the wardrobe and something dropped on the floor and it was a diary'. Of me brother's, and it was open August 9th, Muriel's birthday. And she said, 'He wanted me to send you some flowers'.[102]

Mrs Downing, who came to live in Dudley in 1948, recalled - with some confusion - a neighbour in her birthplace of Tividale telling her about an experience following a family bereavement:

> Whether she said it was her son that saw the father appear at the foot of her bed or whether she said it was she herself. Whether it was her 21st birthday or her son's 21st birthday, but she said that her father was seen at the foot of her bed.

Thereafter Mrs Downing never doubted the possibility of spirits returning to provide comfort:

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[101] RPMSI, G16.
[102] RPMSI, D16.

> She was so convincing that it convinced me. After that I thought it was possible. Not that I've had any experience, apart from reading about people who've had the same thing, with somebody they've loved dearly appearing.[103]

Mr Bedford, born in 1925, who moved to the Wren's Nest Estate in 1936, similarly never had personal experience of a spirit but, whilst his responses were terse, it is clear that he felt that the regularity of such accounts in the locality constituted sufficient reason to believe in an afterlife:

> Q. If somebody had said when you were a young man, why do you believe there's an afterlife, what would you have said?
> Well, you hear about people getting haunted dain't yer?
>
> Q. So have you ever seen or heard a ghost?
> No.
>
> Q. But believe they exist?
> Yes [...] People that's passed away. People talked about them locally [...]
>
> Q. People on this estate?
> Yes.
>
> Q. Ghosts of people they knew?
> Yes, yes.
>
> Q. Going back a long way?
> Yes, years ago.[104]

Such communication, it seems, reinforced communally patterned interpretations of private experiences.[105]

There is insufficient evidence from oral testimony to make confident claims about any significant class differences in experiences of spiritual communication. The great majority of interviewees were unequivocally working-class, a few had moved upward into the middle class in their adult lives.[106] Experiences of, and belief in, the visit of dead spirits were more significantly inflected by gender. Most of the relevant testimony was given by female interviewees. As Bennett

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[103] RPMSI, D8.
[104] RPMSI, D3.
[105] Similar accounts in the media in recent years can only have served further to reinforce such beliefs.
[106] Most of the evidence adduced to illustrate the experiences of contact with spirits is from oral testimony from working-class people, but it should be noted that Bennett's sample were overwhelmingly middle-class.

argued of her interviewees,[107] the predisposition towards belief in, and experience of, spirits was strongly influenced by women's reliance on, and love for, the family. Most spirits were those of loved family members: husbands, parents, siblings or children. As in Bennett's sample, the returning familial spirits were all purposive, unlike the traditional ghost, an extension of the family into the afterlife, and experiences were shaped around a number of recurring themes: the spirit welcoming the dying into the afterlife, returning to assist in a dilemma, to give comfort to the bereaved and to resolve unresolved relationship difficulties, and the spirit assisting in discoveries of lost or essential objects. All of these are types which Bennett identified in her study, types which derive from the traditional folklore of ghosts, but reworked and given meaning in the modern context and fulfilling the socio-culturally shaped expectations of women, reflecting their roles as nurturers and carers in a domestic environment.

Only one case of personal experience of a spirit - that of his deceased wife - was gathered from a male respondent, whose whole testimony was characterised by a regularity of references to his wife unusual amongst male respondents, reflecting an apparently exceptional emotional investment.[108] More male than female respondents were willing to dismiss the possibility, justifying their scepticism in scientific terms, explaining such experiences in terms of physiological or psychological disorder, emotion and desire or a vivid imagination.[109] Female respondents who had not had personal experience of spirits claimed to have been more inclined, in most cases throughout their lives, to entertain the possibility that others had.

The evidence of both Mass-Observation and Gorer's study reinforces this observation. In a report of 1942, Mass-Observation noted that 'ghosts' were generally those of family members and brought comfort rather than fear.[110] The report also noted that of the thirty in a hundred national panel members who reported experiences of spirits, or friends who had had such experiences,

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[107] Bennett, *Traditions of Belief*, p. 32.

[108] RPMSI, D19.

[109] e.g. Mr Tomlins (RPMSI, G29); Mr Carter (RPMSI, D4); Mr Hammond (RPMSI, D16). Again, these explanations were all identified by Bennett amongst sceptics in her sample.

[110] M-O A: FR1315, 'Report on Death and the Supernatural', 18 June 1942, p. 30

eighteen were women.[111] A report of 1947 stated simply that women were more predisposed than men towards belief in the possibility of such experiences.[112] In Gorer's sample from the early 1950s, 13% of men and 21% of women believed in 'ghosts'.[113]

There is little evidence of any decline in the belief in, and experience of, spirits of deceased family members in Dudley and Gornal between 1914 and 1965. Whilst the Spiritualist churches may have fared best in the Black Country, as elsewhere, in the wake of the mass bereavements caused by war, the inescapable presence of death within families continued to generate private experiences throughout the period. Keith Thomas's thesis may be partially applicable here. As the death rate among children and young adults decreased, mourning was increasingly restricted to more predictable parts of the life-cycle: the death of parents and, in particular, the death of one's husband. However, the argument that increasing longevity and that independence from the wishes of previous generations resulted in the disappearance of ghosts cannot be sustained. Indeed if, as historians have argued, the early twentieth century led to the emergence of what came to be considered the 'traditional' working-class family, the spirits discussed above may be a product of modern social conditions. More prosperous and more inward-looking, John Benson has argued,

> the combination of improving material conditions and declining family size tended to foster closer family relationships; it encouraged family members to spend more time at home, to spend more time together and, it seems, to enjoy one another's company.[114]

The same social trends which, as chapter 7 will argue, tended to militate against involvement in associational religion, helped to generate the intense emotional bonds of the family which sustained the belief in, and experience of, the spirits of departed family members.

It is more difficult to distinguish belief from experience in the case of miraculous experiences. The typical miraculous experiences identified by Glock and Stark are ones of healing or of life-sparing divine intervention.[115] Such were the most commonly mentioned miraculous

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[111] *Ibid.*, p. 5
[112] M-O A: 'The Supernatural', *Bulletin*, New Series 5, January 1947, p. 2.
[113] Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, p. 263.
[114] John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939* (1989), pp. 95 and 101.
[115] Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society*, pp. 49-51.

experiences amongst the Dudley and Gornal interviewee sample, but since healings and recoveries in the accounts of local interviewees were concerned not with a sense of God's presence but interpreted as evidence of God's work they have been considered as an aspect of popular religious belief.

The sense of being protected from danger was experienced by both church-goers and non churchgoers. The feeling was felt most acutely by some during World War II. Mr Bedford, for example, who scarcely ever attended church after leaving Sunday School, recalled a powerful sense of divine protection when, as a young adult, he was in London at the time the doodle-bombs were dropping.[116] For many manual workers, of course, the workplace continued to be a place of potential danger. Mr Carter, born in 1930, a resident of the Wren's Nest Estate, rarely attended church as an adult but sustained a firm belief in Jesus as the one 'in charge'. A foundry worker, he suffered an accident at work in the 1960s, leaving him with a permanently injured finger. The damage might have been much worse, but for a timely intervention:

> Down hospital I told them if it had not been for Him up there I would not be here, I could feel my eyes rolling round and was choking. Him up there sparked my brain - 'Hit that bloody button there!' - He made me do it, it stopped, I got meself free and passed out. Him up there told me to hit it.[117]

Whilst saving people from danger apparently seemed, to those non-churchgoers who had such experiences, a perfectly reasonable divine end in itself, regular churchgoers were more inclined to interpret such experiences as part of a broader divine plan for their lives.

Revelational Experiences

'Revelational' experiences, according to Glock and Stark the least common type, figured only occasionally in the respondents' accounts.[118] A few identified God as the source of their otherwise inexplicable knowledge about the future or the past. More considered such experiences as 'weird'

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[116] RPMSI, D3.
[117] RPMSI, D4.
[118] Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society*, p. 54.

or 'uncanny', perhaps reflecting a sense that some supernatural influence might somehow be at work.

Distinctions need to be drawn between different types of revelational experiences. Some were sanctioned by the teachings of some, or all, of the Christian churches. Others were part of a folk discourse only loosely linked to, or sometimes antithetical to, Christian belief and practice. Some were confined in their significance to the recipient of the knowledge, others were applicable to friends or relatives, and others were more generally applicable.

Glock and Stark distinguish between enlightenment and commission experiences. The former entails the reception of information about ultimate truths and did not feature in any of the oral accounts for Dudley and the Gornals. The latter entails the reception of instructions to pursue a certain course in order to further divine plans. Again, no interviewee claimed to have heard a divine voice imparting specific instructions. If the 'commissioning' experience is considered more inclusively, however, the conviction that one has a vocation in life must be included.

The sense of vocation was restricted amongst interviewees to a small minority. This minority was either born into the middle class, or moved up into the middle class in adulthood, and consisted of committed regular church-goers. Working-class respondents and those on the margins of institutional religiosity did not claim to have received divine guidance in the pursuit of their spiritual or secular careers, but were more likely to interpret them either in terms of human choices or as the workings of an impersonal and distant fate.[119]

The call to preach could generate a sense of vocation. In the Church of England, the opportunity to preach was restricted to the priesthood, so any sense of the call to preach entailed ordination and a full-time profession.[120] Methodists, on the other hand, including those from the

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[119] It is interesting to note that in 1934 the Methodist Conference's highly idealistic vision of a Christian social order included the return of a sense of vocation to work through the restoration of the value of craftsmanship: *Methodist Conference Minutes*, 1934, pp. 391-400.

[120] Only one such 'call' features in the extant records for the Dudley and Gornal Anglican churches, and was experienced by a middle-class male. In April 1952, C.J. Young, choir and sidesman at St Francis's church on the Priory Estate, was accepted as a candidate for Holy Orders, the parish's first candidate for ordination. Young had been a highly trained engineer, had previously been considering ordination, but had only felt a definite call during the course of a diocesan mission in 1951(*St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher's Church*, April 1952).

working class, had the opportunity to train as local preachers. The oral testimony of local preachers in Dudley and Gornal, gathered exclusively from those who have been socially upwardly mobile, does not assist in any analysis of the sense of vocation to preach amongst those who remained firmly working-class. Indeed, it may be argued that the vocation to preach, and the more general sense that God had a plan for one's life encouraged the study, discipline and effort in life that facilitated upward mobility.

Much of the evidence for a sense of vocation to preach must be drawn from minutes and other records of the local preachers meetings for the Dudley circuit. Occasional mention is made of the sense of vocation throughout, before and after, the period 1914-65. Decisions were made, it would seem, on the basis of the presence or absence of a sense of God's calling. In December 1897, for example, the minutes record that 'Brother Price' asked to be taken off trial as a local preacher, despite successful preaching, on 'ground of his not feeling called to the work'.[121] Brothers Oakley and Burston testified to their call to preach to the local preachers' meeting in 1911 and 1915 respectively.[122] In April 1932, Caleb Beardsmore, founder of Eve Lane Pentecostal church in Upper Gornal, resigned as a local preacher, informing the Superintendent minister of the Dudley circuit that he 'believed he was Divinely guided to another sphere of service',[123] a belief reiterated in a letter to the second circuit minister two months later when he resigned from the Wesleyan church, stating, 'I believe the Lord has called me to worship and serve Him in another corner of his vineyard'.[124] In February 1956, Howard B. Hanson wrote to the Dudley Local Preachers' meeting, expressing his wish to become a local preacher and adding, 'I feel that I must at least do my utmost to preach the gospel. My whole being is permeated with this one desire and has been for some time'.[125]

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[121] Dudley Wesleyan Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, December 1897.
[122] Dudley Wesleyan Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, June 1911 and December 1915.
[123] Dudley Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, April 1932.
[124] Dudley Local Preachers' Correspondence, letter from Caleb Beardsmore to Reverend Dawson, April 1932.
[125] Dudley Local Preachers' Correspondence, letter from Howard B. Hanson to A.H. Bennett, 6 February 1956.

As with accounts of conversion experiences, one needs to be aware that an account of the 'call to preach' given before the Local Preachers' meeting was a common part of the transition to full local preacher status. A sense of vocation was thus an institutionally structured part of the Methodist local preacher's discourse. It was also reinforced through the teaching of evangelical Methodist Bible classes. Mr Griffin recalled the encouragement of the leader of Vicar Street Bible Class, Dudley, in the early 1950s when the emphasis was on the call to the ministry, but also more generally on the call to preach. 'Nothing higher, nothing finer', was the frequently repeated message.[126]

Oral evidence reinforces the need for caution in evaluating such evidence. Mrs Griffin, according to the minutes of the local preachers' meeting, had 'a real sense of devotion and calling' to work as a local preacher in 1951.[127] Interviewed forty-five years later, however, she stated that the sense of vocation to become a local preacher was 'slight but not too much'. A far stronger sense of vocation had accompanied her plan to become a deaconess or a youth leader in the Methodist church, neither of which jobs she ever did.[128] Whilst providing a warning about the reliability of written sources, this testimony also provides some evidence that a sense of vocation was not always simply a pious retrospective rationalisation of one's life, but a genuine sense of calling which might be frustrated by circumstances.

Occasionally, the call to work in the church was insistent, long-term and confusing, seeming to contradict commonsense in its threat to comfortable material circumstances. Mr Beckley, born in 1902, the son of a Primitive Methodist minister, had his own small business in Coventry as a young man in the early 1920s, but visited Vicar Street chapel in Dudley, where his father was minister, to take a Young Men's Bible class. Business activities lost their interest, whilst the work with the class was successful and began to feel like a Divine call. The conviction that the feeling was a true call arrived only when God spoke through a Biblical passage:

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[126] RPMSI, D11.
[127] Dudley Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, November 1951.
[128] RPMSI, D11.

> Gradually the call to come and live in Dudley became very insistent and very powerful. I used to walk about in Coventry trying to thrash this out [...] One morning I was reading the Bible and Moses had a conversation with God and Moses said, 'Well, how will the people know that I have been called?' God said, 'Go and tell them that I have called *you* to do that work and get on with it'. That proved to be the clue. And I left my business, sold it. I came here, Whitsuntide 1930.[129]

In some cases, the call to work for God in His church took the form of, or was accompanied by, some sort of crisis: being spared from death, for example. In one case, however, the untimely death of a dearly loved brother was inexplicably preceded by an overwhelming sense of the need to return to church. Mr Lewis, a Wren's Nest Estate resident born in 1932, stopped attending St Christopher's church at sixteen or seventeen and cut all links with organised religion for the next seventeen years. Although never consciously rejecting religious belief, he carried out no private religious practices during this period. In 1966, one of his brothers died suddenly and unexpectedly just before Christmas. A few days before, Mr Lewis had been to a service at Vicar Street Methodist chapel, where another brother regularly attended, the first time he had been to an ordinary Sunday service for many years:

> The week before I went to Vicar Street [...] I went to bed on the Tuesday and I was woke in the middle of the night and a very funny feeling [...] as if the walls was saying something to me, that was the feeling I'd got [same happened on the Thursday night]. On Friday morning I said to me mother 'I've had a funny feeling and I'm going to go to church' [...] Anyhow I went to bed on Saturday night and this thing came so terrific - I've never experienced anything like it - it was telling me, go to church, go to church [...] I went to church there [Vicar Street] on 18th December and 23rd December my brother died of a heart attack.[130]

The call to go back to church was interpreted in part as a means of providing the emotional support necessary to cope with the bereavement, but also, retrospectively, as evidence of God's inclusion of Mr Lewis in His plans for the rebuilding of the churches:

> I'd got to go to church before that tragedy happened to our family [...] I think the answer was that God wanted me to come to church, not only me but thousands more to build His church up again [...] I think that was the way He brought me back.[131]

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[129] RPMSI, D2.
[130] RPMSI, D21.
[131] RPMSI, D21. A tension remained in Mr Lewis's account between the pain, anger and bitterness felt at the time of, and long after, his brother's death, and his retrospective rationalisation of the event as part of God's plan.

For a few, the experience of a call to spiritual work took the form of delivery from the jaws of death. This sometimes meant that the precise nature of the work to be done was not clear, but the feeling that one had been saved for a purpose was quite emphatic. Some men, regular practising Christians, returning from active service in World War II, had a sense that God had protected them for a purpose. Sometimes, this assurance was experienced during the time of danger. Mr Grainger, born in Lower Gornal in 1917, and later a churchwarden at St Francis's church on the Priory Estate, recalled his unshakeable confidence in his own survival, despite the loss of friends:

> I always felt God had something for me to do. For being protected there was something else that I'd got to do.[132]

Mr Grainger who, for some years whilst raising a young family had only occasionally attended church, continued his account by adding that shortly after the death of his first wife in 1959, he heard a voice, on a single specific occasion, instructing him to go back to his church. He began attending St Francis's church on the Priory Estate and a year later became churchwarden: 'that was the job that God had got for me'.[133]

For others, however, their own survival was a puzzle for many years after the war, and the feeling that God had protected them only came later in life as the narrative structure of their own biographies were projected backwards. Mr Thomas, a Dudley Methodist, was deeply distressed by the deaths of friends during his service in the Near East, and questioned the reason for his own survival. During the early 1990s, he started to train to become a local preacher:

> I suddenly realised that this was the way the Lord was protecting me. I didn't know why. Why should I be any different to anyone else? I was out there as a soldier like everybody else. Why should my mates put their lives in front of me? Of course now, it's all in God's plans, God had plans for me in my life. I think now it's took a long, long time for you to realise it but this is all part of God's wonderful plan.[134]

In one case, sudden salvation from the danger of death was immediately interpreted as a Divine call, an interpretation undoubtedly shaped by the society in which the respondent was spending

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[132] RPMSI, D12.
[133] RPMSI, D12.
[134] RPMSI, D27.

much of his time. Mr Griffin, a Dudley Grammar school boy regularly attending a Young Men's Crusaders' Bible Class and Vicar Street Young Men's Bible Class in the early 1950s, also spent considerable time talking to a friend about the latter's call to the ministry. When he felt a sudden and inexplicable compulsion to stop whilst walking home one day through thick fog - and then realised that he was at a quarry's edge - the event was immediately and unequivocally interpreted as a Divine call to the ministry. He went on to become a Methodist minister.[135]

A sense of vocation in secular careers was even less common, despite the efforts of ministers and church workers to instil such an attitude. In February 1947, for example, St Christopher's parish magazine contained an article urging readers to accept that all work was vocational and should be done in the spirit of giving glory to God and in March 1965 the parish magazine for St Edmund's church included a report of a talk given by Miss Coggan, sister of the Archbishop of York, on 'The Christian Vocation in Daily Life and Work'.[136] Oral testimony, however, suggests that such teaching was meaningful only for a small minority. Out of over sixty interviewees, only two spoke of any sense of a vocation to a career. Mr Beckley, who felt a vocation to work with the Vicar Street Young Men's Bible Class, also felt that he was called to his professional work in the Dudley Probation Service, a career which complemented his church work, providing further opportunities for outreach to young men.[137] Mrs Cash, born in 1925 and a lifelong regular attender at St Edmund's, never had any sense of vocation in any of her many roles in the church, but had a firm sense of a Divine calling when she began her professional career in teaching in 1956:

> I did indeed, I had resisted so many times already. God's told me twice now. He's kicked me into it, so I had to do it. So once I got started, yes it was.[138]

The message was effected through human agency - opportunities to teach and the Head of St Edmund's day school asking her to teach - but was believed to be Divine.

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[135] RPMSI, D11.
[136] *St Francis's Church Magazine with St Christopher's Church*, February 1947; *Parish Magazine of St Edmund's, Dudley*, March 1965.
[137] RPMSI, D2.
[138] RPMSI, D5.

A sense of vocation was restricted to a church-going middle-class minority with a heightened sense of the spiritual and humanitarian value of their own work. It was also, by virtue of the life choices available to men, mainly a male experience. The experience was felt most acutely when it appeared to provide a resolution to apparent contradictions. These arose either from questions of theodicy which became acute when one survived whilst one's friends did not, or from a sense that one's career was insistently taking a course which one had either resisted or which seemed to undermine the stability of an already established career.

If a sense of vocation was a predominantly male experience, a sense of God's loving protection and his control of the direction of one's life could be felt most acutely by women faced by the dangers of childbirth. Mrs Jeavons, brought up in St Francis's Sunday School, spent much of her young adult life with no regular church involvement. When she became pregnant in her early thirties (the early 1960s) she was told that a heart condition rendered her pregnancy extremely dangerous. She prayed to God and had what she described as a 'revelatory' experience, giving her an unprecedented feeling of peace, which thereafter never entirely left her.[139]

More common than a sense of God's plan for one's own life were experiences of foreknowledge or an intuitive apprehension of past events, often attributed not to a Divine revelation but to the workings of an impersonal superempirical realm with which it was possible to have some communication. In various ways, such experiences were common both to church-goers and to those on the margins of church involvement.

Accounts of foreknowledge acquired through dreams were provided by some interviewees, both regular- and non-church-attenders. Mr Downing, born in 1922, brought up in a Church of England Sunday School outside Dudley, and a monthly attender as an adult at St James's, Eve Hill in Dudley, after the War, recounted not only having his fortune correctly told, but also having dreams as a young man which contained visions of places he had never seen, but which later proved to be visually accurate.[140] Mrs Griffiths, born in Dudley in 1931 and a regular at Wolverhampton

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[139] RPMSI, D20.
[140] RPMSI, D8.

Street Methodist Sunday School until 16, rarely attended chapel thereafter. She too often had dreams which came true but was less sure about whether they came from God, tending to think rather that they come from some other, undefined source.[141]

The dreams related by Mrs Griffiths were concerned with friends and family in need of assistance or experiencing suffering. Such dreams seem to have been the most common sort experienced by women, again reflecting the importance of family relationships in women's lives. Occasionally, such dreams were disturbing. Mrs Tudor, born in 1918 in central Dudley, lived with her grandmother and attended St Thomas's Sunday School to the age of 16 but thereafter rarely attended church. She related how she dreamed one night, as a youngster, that her uncle was trying to kill her mother (who lived on the Priory Estate), to discover the next day that her uncle had come home drunk and had tried to strangle her mother.[142] Similarly, Mrs Brooks, born in Gornal Wood in 1905 and a regular Sunday scholar at Zoar United Methodist chapel, but an infrequent church or chapel attender as an adult, recalled dreaming when very young that her paternal grandfather was coughing up blood, and that he later died of a disease of the throat.[143]

There is little evidence to suggest that those who experienced prophetic dreams shared them with others to create a contemporary oral tradition of the sort that undoubtedly accompanied and shaped experiences of family spirits. There was, however, an older local oral tradition which provided some sanction for the belief that dreams could be prophetic and should not be taken lightly. Mrs Childs recalled her father and her brother reciting a song based on the dream of a child whose father was a coalminer:

> Don't go down in the mine dad. Dreams very often come true, but dad do you know it would break my heart if anything happened to you. Go and tell my dream to your mates, for as sure as the sun shines, something is going to happen today, dear Daddy, don't go down the mine.[144]

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[141] RPMSI, D10. Also Mrs Tomlins (RPMSI, G29) who, as a teenager during World War II, dreamed on consecutive nights of a plane crashing and a ship being sunk, both dreams being followed by matching newspaper headlines the following mornings.
[142] RPMSI, D28.
[143] RPMSI, G2.
[144] RPMSI, G7.

She added, by way of conclusion, that 'they was all called' (i.e. died).

Those who had experienced prophetic dreams only rarely identified God as their source. In only one case did an interviewee claim that God had revealed His will through a dream, in this case, that of a friend. Mrs Wesley, born in 1921, a member and lifelong regular attender at Five Ways Methodist chapel, was averse to speaking in public until a friend approached her sometime in the late 1940s, asking her to speak at a Ladies' Meeting at Kent Street Methodist chapel:

> I thought, 'I can't do anything like that'. And she said, 'Well I've had a dream, the Lord's told me to ask you.' So I went, and I've been 'wenting' ever since![145]

More frequently, the content of the dream was not so obviously concerned with God's will, but with kinship and neighbourhood relationships. Most commonly (five out of six), in this sample, prophetic dreams were experienced by women, and such dreams occasionally provided the spur for the dreamer to check on the well-being of family, friends and neighbours.[146]

The number of people relating accounts of any one of the revelational experiences discussed above is small, rarely reaching double figures out of a sample of sixty. The number that could relate one or other of them, however, is considerably higher. Moreover, since the various types of experience were not pre-defined before the interviews, not all interviewees were asked about every sort of experience, so the number of recorded cases may underestimate their overall frequency.

Confirming Experiences

The 'confirming' religious experience, it will be recalled, denotes a 'generalized sense of sacredness', or a 'specific awareness of the presence of divinity'/the supernatural.[147] As such, it is less dramatic than the responsive or revelational experience and potentially more easily dismissed as simply an expression of human emotions. Nevertheless, that emotions should sometimes be

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[145] RPMSI, G30.

[146] Of a 1942 Mass-Observation sample of 50 men and 50 women, four men and three women claimed that either they or their friends had had prophetic dreams, with only three claiming to have had the dreams themselves: M-O A: FR1315, 'Report on Death and the Supernatural', 18 June 1942, p. 5.

[147] Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society*, pp. 43-6.

assigned spiritual significance by those who experienced them is surely significant in any assessment of the progress of secularisation. The frequency and social context of such experiences therefore demand investigation.

A sense of contact with the Divine or the supernatural realm was not experienced by all, but by many of the respondents, and took a great variety of forms. For some, it was associated with a sense of the holiness of certain places. In some cases, particularly among Anglo-Catholics, the experience was linked with particular sites of pilgrimage, such as Walsingham and among those from a variety of traditions in more recent years (from the 1970s), Oberammergau.[148] In the last thirty years, a number of respondents had enjoyed the opportunity to visit other sites overseas, but the most intense confirming experience resulting from visits to religious sites overseas was undergone during active service in the Middle East during World War II. Mr Thomas, born in Bloxwich in 1926, moved to the Priory Estate in Dudley in 1932 and attended St Francis's Sunday School until the age of 16. Finding himself in Jerusalem in 1945, he took the opportunity to visit Christ's tomb, and was taken aback at meeting an acquaintance from Dudley during his visit:

> With this it made me realise there was something in Jerusalem we had to learn. And when I went into the tomb and came out, I said to the young girl [a Baptist working for the Salvation Army] - we were quite good friends - 'Joy, truth or myth?' And she said, 'You've only got to look at my face and you've got the answer, and you only have to look at your face and those of others coming out of there, you'll have the answer as well.' There was no doubt at all when you came out of that tomb that Jesus Christ is alive today, and it is the truth [...] That was a great turning point for me.[149]

He later became a Methodist Local Preacher.

Opportunities to visit sites of pilgrimage were limited; the opportunity to enter the local church building was available to all. The church building was one place where some found a sense of holiness. Mr Downing, who moved as an adult from Oldbury to Dudley where, from the late 1940s he attended St James's Church of England, Eve Hill once a month, retained a strong sense of the holiness of the inside of the church. 'There's a feeling at church you don't get anywhere else,'

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[148] e.g. Mrs Cash (RPMSI, D5) and Mrs Healey (RPMSI, G12) for Walsingham; Mr Dickens (RPMSI, D7) and Mrs and Mrs Downing (RPMSI, D8) for Oberammergau.

[149] RPMSI, D27

he insisted: 'the blessings'.[150] Nor was such a feeling restricted to regular churchgoers. Mrs Richards, born in 1941 on the Priory Estate, was brought up in the St John's Spiritualist Church Sunday School (and occasionally attended St Francis's Sunday School), but only attended special services after reaching the age of sixteen. Whilst many of her religious beliefs were unclear and uncertain, she retained a lifelong strong sense of peace and holiness associated with the church:

> I've never lost my faith in the Church [...] I think when you walk inside a church and have said a little prayer and come out you feel refreshed. When I come out of church I feel refreshed. I feel as though I've been freed of something, I feel refreshed.[151]

If the church provided a diffuse sense of holiness, hymns could provide an intensified sense of theological truth. Miss Haywood, asked whether she ever recalled having an intense experience of God's presence, recalled one occasion during her early adulthood when she was struck by the words of a popular hymn:

> Oh yes, yes. Once when singing a hymn it suddenly came to me - 'Praise my soul the King of Heaven', it was - we were singing the words 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven'. I thought it ought to have been forgiven and then restored and that made a big impact on me when I thought about it that day. I'd sung the hymn hundreds of times before, but that particular morning it made a big impact on me [...] Yes there's been one or two experiences like that.[152]

For others, hymns provided a powerful affirmation of long-accepted theological truths which were at the centre of their spiritual and emotional lives. Mr Raybould, born in 1916 in Wombourne, married a Gornal woman after World War II and moved to Lower Gornal, attending Lake Street regularly until his wife's death. An outsider in Gornal, for many years he sustained comfort from hymns promising Christ's loyal companionship, a comfort intensified after the death of his wife in 1982. His sense of social isolation and the value of spiritual companionship were reinforced by the absence of male social networks for emotional support:

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[150] RPMSI, D8.
[151] RPMSI, D23.
[152] RPMSI, D17.

> 'Abide With Me', because it's as true as that's that chair, there. 'When other hope has paled and comforts flee, then Lord abide with me' [...] As I've found it out myself [...] Women stick together, but men don't. [153]

Similarly, Mrs Mason, born in 1908, also found solace in images of comfort and friendship expressed in hymns:

> 'What a friend we have in Jesus' [...] It's true isn't it? When read it, word for word, I think it's true you can get a lot of peace and satisfaction, help and comfort from it.[154]

Hymn-singing and a love of hymns were not, however, the preserve of regular church-goers and hymns did not always provide a clarification of an explicit theology. For some, they simply felt intrinsically right and true as one sang them. Mr Tranter, born in 1926 and brought up in Zoar Sunday School, Gornal Wood, only attended special services, such as Anniversaries, as an adult. A favourite hymn from childhood onwards was 'The Old Rugged Cross':

> I don't know I think it was a hymn that came to you as you were singing it [...] They seem to come to you and you feel it as you're singing them.[155]

Popular amongst better-known hymns were some which celebrated nature, and belief in God was, for many, underpinned by a semi-intuitive, semi-rationalised popular argument from design. For some, admiring the beauty of nature and the marvel of creation was a form of quasi-worship, a confirmation of God's presence in the world, although the notion was mocked by clergymen as an excuse for indulging in Sunday excursions rather than attending church.[156] Mrs Downing, a member St James's, Eve Hill Mothers' Union who also took her children to Sunday School, felt that the Sunday walk in Priory Park was just as much a part of Sunday worship as church attendance:

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[153] RPMSI, G25.
[154] RPMSI, G22.
[155] RPMSI, G28. The objection might, of course, be made that such accounts from elderly interviewees merely reflect the nostalgic power of hymns, particularly for those who are widowed or lonely. Chapter 3, however, has presented evidence of the power of hymns to evoke an intense response amongst adult men and women.
[156] e.g. *DH*, 12 November 1921, 25 July 1925.

> I think they [going to church and going for walk in park] are combined, because even when you're doing it you're aware of it, because it's God's work and we're privileged to be able to see it.[157]

Mrs Jeavons, born in 1933, lived on the Priory Estate and attended St Francis's Sunday School until she was sixteen after which she had minimal contact with church until she had a family in her early thirties. Whilst at Wolverhampton Art College in her late teens she attended a course at Attingham Hall called 'The Search for Truth', run by George Trevellyan. This was a memorable experience, her first encounter with total silence (no traffic noise, no radio) producing a 'sense of other-worldliness' and a personal 'Damascus effect'. The greatest impact was made by the wonder of a time-lapse photography film of plant growth. Although transformed from a 'giddy teenager' by this experience of the marvel of creation, Mrs Jeavons only returned to a full involvement in the church after the birth of her first child which, particularly in the light of a heart condition which meant that she had been advised against child-bearing, greatly reinforced her sense of awe at the 'miracle' of new life. 'Something happens to women at childbirth,' she claimed. 'It's a creative experience. For some it's horrendous, for others it turns round into their view of creation'. Thereafter the creation of new life continued to generate, for Mrs Jeavons, as much as anything, a feeling of worshipfulness.

There remain a variety of other experiences of holiness, difficult to categorise, and sometimes recalled without precision either in respect of their nature or the time of their occurrence, but apparently following the pattern of 'confirming' experiences. That they were profound experiences cannot be doubted. Mrs Jones, a committed Methodist born in 1940, could not specify particular occasions but insisted:

> There have been times when you feel the Lord is really near. When you almost feel you could reach out and touch him, sort of thing.[158]

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[157] RPMSI, D8.
[158] RPMSI, G19.

Mr Griffin, a committed Methodist born in 1932 and later a Methodist minister, was similarly imprecise but insistent:

> If the one or two mystical experiences I've had are anything to go by then in a mystical experience one is totally and utterly caught up in a sense of the presence of God's love.[159]

An undefined sense of evil or unpleasantness was experienced by a smaller minority. Like the sense of holiness, it was most often associated with place. For those who were most hostile to religion in its institutional form and most inclined towards personal agnosticism, church buildings could be the physical expression of the unwelcome associations of formal religion. Mr Tomlins, born in Lower Gornal in 1929, attended Robert Street Strict Baptist Sunday School as a child and, having hated its coldness and the perceived hypocrisy of his Baptist relatives, disassociated himself entirely from formal religion as an adult and retained a hostility to its practitioners. Asked whether he could recall ever having a sense of evil or discomfort associated with a particular place he replied:

> That feeling that you get when you walk into a cellar, that cold feeling. Now that's the feeling that anybody gets when they walk into church, very cold, windows round you, creates another feeling because it's something that is different to the normal things as you do in life. There is a clammy feeling to it. I've always felt that when I go into church [...] Off-putting yes.[160]

A sense of discomfort or evil associated with places (and even with churches) was not, however, restricted to those hostile to formal religion. Mrs Cash, born in 1925, and a lifelong attender at St Edmund's church, Dudley, recalled that as a child she did not have any sense of a real devil, but had an inexplicable sense of evil associated with particular places. One of these was Enville church. More disruptive of her daily life, however, was a sense of evil attached to parts of Dudley. She would take a long diversion to avoid a stretch of Priory Road and the path from Castle Gates past the Priory ruins. These places 'didn't seem right', a feeling which still occasionally occurs. She concluded, 'there's evil in the air and I can smell it and taste it'.[161]

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[159] RPMSI, D11.
[160] RPMSI, G29.
[161] RPMSI, D5.

A similar feeling of evil was experienced by Mr Downing, who lived in Wolverhampton Street, Dudley, from the late 1940s and attended St James's, Eve Hill. Unlike Mrs Cash, he refused to leave the feeling entirely without explanation, perhaps reflecting a particularly male wish to rationalise the apparently irrational:

> Many times, places of evil. Not imagine it, I know it. Something must have happened sometime in the past. The house we lived in at Wolverhampton Street, there was one spot on one landing and I always thought there was something wrong and I never said anything to the family [...] But in recent years, my youngest son, we were talking and he said 'I always used to think there was something wrong with that one spot', and I'd never said it to him. And another time, there used to be a signpost when I was a lad. I was at a signpost and I used to think there was something wrong and I didn't know what it was and years and years afterwards, a letter in the *Birmingham Post* said it was a place where hanging took place.[162]

It is difficult to identify any clear patterns in terms of gender, class and differing degrees of involvement in associational religion in the incidence of confirming experiences. Their variety and the limited frequency of each particular type make any general conclusions at best very provisional and at worst potentially misleading. Nevertheless, it seems that the emotional resonance of hymns had a particular effect on men who rarely attended chapel, providing a link both with the culture of the chapel from which they were distanced and, perhaps more importantly, with memories of home, parents and childhood from which they felt irrevocably separated. A sense of awe at creation and the beauty of nature, on the other hand, may have been more common to women, and reinforced by experiences of childbirth.

Conclusion

The deeply personal nature of religious experience is such as to render direct questioning on the matter unhelpful with some interviewees - particularly men - who have had little institutional religious involvement and whose lives have not been inflected with many of the practices and beliefs of private religiosity. Even in the absence of personal recollections of such experiences responses sometimes indicated a belief in their possibility and even implied that the interviewee had

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[162] RPMSI, D8.

undergone some form of religious experience, the details of which he/she was either unable or unwilling to recall:

> Q. Have there ever been times when you have had a religious experience, a feeling of being very close to God or something beyond us?
> I think everybody's supposed to have felt that at some time or other. I can't remember now.[163]

The response of Mr Bedford, a resident of the Wren's Nest Estate since his childhood in the 1920s and 30s, and a very infrequent church attender as an adult, implies the existence of a contemporary oral tradition - perhaps produced, perhaps reinforced, by the focus of the popular media on supernatural matters - defining certain experiences as 'religious', and asserting their prevalence as evidence that such experiences are, under certain circumstances, a normal part of life, and neither deviant, embarrassing nor in need of apology in modern society. At the very least, the existence of such contemporary beliefs demands some close examination of unilinear secularisation theses which emphasise the increasing authority in the modern world of the behavioural and organizational sciences, of the scientific orientation in general and of a predominantly rational understanding of both our own selves and of the world around us.[164] The oral evidence explored in this chapter suggests that this belief is not simply the result of a late twentieth-century media-generated interest in the supernatural, but indicative of a significant strand of continuity running throughout the period 1914-1965 and to the present day. The nature and extent of religious experience is complicated and variable as this chapter has indicated. But whilst many of the traditional religious rituals - both public and private, institutional and domestic - and some of the traditional beliefs, both folk and orthodox, may have suffered a decline in practice and authority, there remained widespread, if highly variable, experiences of what Rudolf Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy,* called 'the numinous', 'the feeling of awe, dread, mystery, and fascination men experience when confronted with what is holy, uncanny, or supernatural'.[165]

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[163] RPMSI, D3.
[164] e.g. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, p. 58.
[165] Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (1971), p.49. Otto's study was published in 1917.

Chapter 7

Popular Religion in Decline

The emphasis of the argument throughout this study has been that popular religious practices, beliefs and experiences and religiously motivated behaviour continued to form a significant element of working-class culture throughout the period. The emphasis is intended to provide a necessary warning against an uncritical acceptance of secularisation theories. It cannot be denied, however, that many of the aspects of popular religion discussed were subject to economic, social and cultural changes which were tending to diminish their role in working-class life. The chain of cause and effect in this process is exceedingly difficult to trace, yet some attempt must be made. Some empirical substantiation will thus be provided for theoretical discussions of secularisation which seek to extend the discussion beyond the role of associational religion in modern life.

A combination of seven major factors contributed to the erosion of popular religion in Dudley and Gornal between 1914 and 1965. Some apply with greater force to one locality than to others, and some had more impact on certain types of belief and practice than on others. No single factor is identified as a 'sufficient cause'. The first four factors in the following list, however, seem to have exerted a more emphatic influence for change than the last three: the effects of war, particularly the Second World War; the increasing availability of secular leisure activities unconnected to the provision by the churches and chapels; an increasing emphasis on the importance of the private nuclear family and changing attitudes to children; the disappearance of older working-class neighbourhoods and communities; increasing material comfort; the increasing authority of scientific, rational, empirical and relativist modes of thought, encouraged by greater access to education and to the broadcasting media and by cultural and religious pluralism; an intensified disillusionment with suffering in the context of an increasingly egalitarian society which encouraged expectations of justice. Decreasing involvement in associational religion was both cause and effect. Whilst the factors identified contributed to the erosion of church and chapel attendance, that very erosion, particularly when

it reached the point of negligible or no involvement in Sunday school, in turn weakened the foundations of religious beliefs and experiences and of religiously motivated behaviour.

War

The deaths, pain and suffering of the two World Wars brought into very sharp relief problems of theodicy. The profound psychological shock on many of those who witnessed and experienced the horrors of the World Wars shattered the religious convictions of some, leaving the concept of a benevolent God discredited. Oral evidence suggests, however, that there was a more complex and seemingly contradictory range of responses to war-time experiences. Few interviewees were able to recall the First World War or comment on its effects on local religious belief and practice.[1] Documentary evidence indicates the extent of temporary losses of men to the Forces and of those permanently lost, killed in action. By July 1918, for example, the Dudley United Methodist circuit had a roll of honour totalling 590, of whom 59 had died and 90 had been wounded.[2] Losses of regular attenders could have a significant impact on a chapel. Mr Hughes, a lifelong attender at Kent Street chapel in Upper Gornal contrasted the 'apparent deadness' of Mount Zion with the 'liveliness' of Kent Street:

> It's very significant that of the people who went to fight in World War I from the Wesleyan, no-one was killed. Of the people who went from Mount Zion, from one small church, they lost twelve young men. That must have had a tremendous impact.[3]

Local Methodist circuits, reliant on lay preaching, encountered difficulties manning pulpits, whilst men's church groups, such as the Men's Class and the Church of England Men's Society at St Edmund's in Dudley, went into abeyance during the War and failed to re-start for several years afterwards.[4] At the end of the War, local churches debated what could be done to provide for the spiritual and social needs of the demobbed forces, often finding it difficult to obtain

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[1] Mrs Mason, born in 1915, a lifelong attender at Five Ways chapel in Lower Gornal, recalled that some men who came back from the trenches, having suffered gassing and burns were 'ruined' and 'never able to mix after that' (RPMSI, G24).

[2] Dudley United Methodist Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1 July 1918.

[3] RPMSI, G18.

[4] King Street Local Preachers' Meeting Minutes, 4 June 1917, 4 and 3 June March 1918; *St Edmund, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, July 1923.

addresses for former attenders and members.[5] It is clear, however, that the effects of the War on civilian life, apart from the absence of many local men on active service, were few compared the the impact of the Second World War.

Both documentary and oral evidence testify to the dramatic changes of the years 1939-45, not solely in terms of those who saw active service, but also in terms of the impact on local civilian life. There is some limited evidence that the suffering associated with the Second World War undermined religious faith amongst non-combatants, though the evidence of Mass-Observation on this matter is far from conclusive. Reported individual comments from London remind us that, as far as civilians were concerned, those in the capital had most reason to reflect on such issues:

> I think the blitz has made people a lot more questioning than they were. It is making them ask: "Well; why is it? Why do we have to suffer all this?" We were all taught in church that if you did right, if you lived a good life, then God would protect you. And now we see the religious people, they seem to be hit more than anybody. It makes people start questioning.[6]

Such responses are also recorded in Dudley. Father John Ferley of St Edmund's reported in the parish magazine an encounter he had locally when a man in a barber shop noted his dog-collar and said that both he and his wife had found that the War made it difficult for them to believe in God; several others told him that the War was a severe test of their faith.[7] His response was somewhat scathing and certainly underestimated the importance of religion for many who rarely came to church:

> when people who never go to Church and perhaps never say their prayers, tell me they are losing their faith, I only wonder that they have got any to lose [...] I can only think they mean that their confidence in their own safety has been upset.[8]

Such a response identified a tendency later highlighted by Mass-Observation reporters: that many of those who, as civilians, found that the War rendered religious belief unsustainable were amongst those who were not fully convinced believers before the War, whilst strong

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[5] King Street Wesleyan Leaders' Meetings Minutes, 12 December 1918.
[6] M-O A, FR1I, 'Religious attitudes', 20 January 1941.
[7] *Parish Magazine of St Edmund, Dudley*, July 1942.
[8] *Parish Magazine of St Edmund, Dudley*, June 1940.

believers were often strengthened in their faith, as chapter 4 has shown.[9] Mass-Observation reports suggest that the religious faith of the majority (between 65 and 75%) of non-combatants during the War remained unaffected by events. More were strengthened in their faith (from 15-25%) than were weakened (around 9%).[10]

The same was not so obviously true of combatants. A Mass-Observation opinion poll of 1947 found that the religious beliefs of a similar majority (67%) of those who had served in the armed forces during the war were unchanged by their experiences. Of those whose beliefs had been affected, however, nearly three quarters claimed to be less inclined towards religious belief and practice than before the War.

For this study, only a small number of interviews were held with war veterans, but such evidence as these interviews provide suggests that the religious predispositions taken into the war tended profoundly to shape religious responses to it.[11] It is undoubtedly significant that interviews were held only with survivors of World War II and that the experiences of the trenches during World War I must have generated a very different set of responses. For those who entered into active service during World War II as committed practising Christians, the experiences of the war could ultimately reinforce religious faith in various ways, though some degree of emotional and religious confusion may have characterised immediate responses. The vivid recollection of special religious services in far-flung parts of the world, a deep sense of fellowship with Christian colleagues and the formation of lasting Christian friendships during the war and subsequent chance (or 'Providential') meetings, all formed salient aspects of discussions of war-time experiences amongst those who have remained, or became, committed practising Christians after the War.[12]

Amongst those who considered themselves Christian believers, but were infrequent church- or chapel-goers, the horrors of war did occasionally shake the foundations of religious beliefs. Mr Sankey confirmed that his experiences during World War II had challenged his faith:

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[9] Mass-Observation, *Puzzled People* (1947), p. 22.
[10] M-O A, FR 1200, 'Religion', 6 April 1942.
[11] Cf. some of the comments made by respondents to the survey written up by D.S. Cairns in *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1919), pp. 8-9.
[12] RPMSI, G17, D27, D12.

> I've seen crashes and people burnt to death. And you think to yourself, why the hell has the Lord let that happen, and it shakes your faith, oh it definitely does [...] when you've seen people going about their work and then all of a sudden 'Bang!' and they're nothing but burning flesh. Well it makes you wonder then, don't it. And that happened several times.[13]

For the majority, however, time and the opportunity for reflection explained such matters away, drawing on the notion of 'Providence' and the slightly resigned and fatalistic acceptance captured in the frequently repeated maxim, 'God works in mysterious ways'.[14]

It is clear, however, that the Second World War had a major impact on local religious practice. Pre-war norms were swept away. Local objections to Sunday cinema in Dudley, expressed in the vote of 1939, were muted by 1941 when Dudley Council decided, on the Military and Airforce Authorities' recommendation to the local Watch Committee, to allow cinemas to open on Sundays.[15] By then Sunday entertainments in the form of concerts and vaudeville had already been attracting large audiences, enjoying a rare opportunity during the week to relax and enjoy themselves.[16]

Sunday routines were disrupted to such an extent that the Sabbath never recovered its pre-war sanctity. In the longer term, this disruption of Sunday habits, whether they included attendance at church or simply a respectful observance of the Sabbath, weakened popular religious belief simply as a result of setting it adrift from a form of popular religious practice. In so far as the war had an effect on people's religious beliefs, it may well have been as a result of the confrontation with scepticism resulting from new social contacts. The War threw together people who might otherwise have experienced little contact with one another. Mr Williams, for example, brought up in an Anglican Sunday school recalled that his earliest doubts about the rewards of heaven resulted from mixing with sceptics during guard duty.[17]

The Blackout quickly reduced evening attendances during the winter months,[18] but local clergymen soon attributed falls in Sunday attendance to the pressures of local war work,

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[13] RPMSI, G29.
[14] E.g., RPMSI, D18 and D21.
[15] *DH*, 4 October 1941.
[16] *DH*, 1 and 15 February and 1 March 1941.
[17] RPMSI, D29. Cf. RPMSI, G1.
[18] *St Edmund, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, January 1940; Wesley Wolverhampton Street Church and School Estate Minute Book, December 1940.

including ARP duties and the holding of civil defence organisation parades on Sunday mornings.[19] Sunday school figures also dropped sharply. At Wesley chapel, Dudley, for example, scholars were forced to vacate their usual venue as the Sunday school building was requisitioned for Home Guard use,[20] and the attendance of senior Sunday scholars and of Sunday school teachers was badly affected by ARP duties and Sunday work.[21] Parents had also become less zealous in their insistence on the attendance of their children at Sunday school. In February 1945, Reverend Shallcross, incumbent of St James's Lower Gornal, attributed the decline in the number of Sunday scholars partly to a declining birth rate but also to the indifference of parents who lay in bed half of Sunday after a week of hard work.[22]

The War effected changes in the routines of the home as well as personal involvement in church and chapel activities. Mrs Beale, a lifelong attender at Himley Road Methodist chapel in Gornal Wood, recalled foregoing involvement in the weekday evening Adult Bible Class and the choir practice due to war work, whilst the recently commenced practice of family Bible reading was also curtailed by the new demands of the war:

> Of course with the war coming and doing other things [...] that sort of fell off because we were all so taken up with so many things to do, somehow [...] Father was doing ARP, my brother was doing home guard.[23]

Miss Haywood, a lifelong attender at Wesley chapel, recalled the disruption of Sunday routines and the failure to return to pre-war habits:

> The War changed the pattern of family life. Things became far more liberal. During the war you had to do things on Sundays that you wouldn't otherwise and that just carried on you see. Sunday observance patterns were broken. During the War, we would have to do ARP duties and people were off to the Services and women too and in the Land Army and these duties had to be maintained [...] you were working so much and so many different hours.[24]

War work and civil defence duties did directly clash with religious observances, but even when they did not, war work was liable to sap energy and intensify the need for rest,

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[19] *DH*, 26 April 1941; St Peter Upper Gornal, PCC Minutes, 10 February 1941; *St Thomas Parish Magazine*, December 1944.
[20] Wesley Wolverhampton Street Church and School Estate Minute Book, 23 May 1941 and 22 May 1944.
[21] Wesley Wolverhampton Street Church and School Estate Minute Book, December 1939, December 1940 and December 1941.
[22] *DH*, 10 February 1945.
[23] RPMSI, G5.
[24] RPMSI, D17.

resulting in the neglect of church attendance, as Reverend Shallcross of St James's Lower Gornal acknowledged.[25] Local clergymen were not always entirely sympathetic, suspecting that war work was being used as an excuse. In December 1941, John Ferley complained that 'some of St Edmund's people are getting slack in their religious practice'.[26] A year and a half after the end of the War, the incumbent of St Francis's on the Priory Estate bemoaned the low attendances since the War, adding that the excuse during the War was Sunday war work but that there was no longer any excuse for failure to attend at least once on a Sunday.[27] Nationally, as locally, the War had greatly disrupted habits of church attendance. In a Mass-Observation survey of 1947, nearly 49% of respondents claimed to attend church less frequently than they had done before the War. Only a minority (15%) of those who attended less were critical of the churches. The explanations given by large majority (65%) were classed by Mass-Observation reporters as 'apathy' and 'excuses' (i.e. had other things to do on Sundays). Whilst it is difficult to ascertain how respondents interpreted the vague Mass-Observation terminology, it seems that the drift away from involvement in the churches was already beginning to be mirrored by a general decline in interest in religious matters. Just over one in five of the sample claimed to be 'less interested in religion' than they had been before, whilst of these 26% claimed to have lost interest during the Second World War (more than for any other single six-year period).[28]

Returning servicemen, their own contacts with the local churches severed, often found the local churches unattractive. The Vicar of St Luke's Dudley commented in the Annual Meeting of the PCC in 1947 that returning servicemen were being put off by apathy amongst churchgoers.[29] Moreover, the return to civilian life was often accompanied less by a thorough-going rejection of religious belief than by a perception of the pre-occupations of the churches as irritatingly narrow, cosy and divorced from the real world which had been so starkly revealed in war-time experiences. Mr Davis, for example, found the zealous defence of the Sabbath amongst his Strict Baptist relatives in Lower Gornal, absurdly disproportionate and

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[25] *DH*, 10 February 1945.
[26] *St Edmund, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, December 1941.
[27] *St Francis Parish Magazine*, April 1947.
[28] M-O A: FR3049, National Poll I, 'Are The Churches doing their Job?'.
[29] St Luke's Parish Church Council Minutes, 27 March 1947.

infuriatingly parochial.[30] Mr Sankey, a Zoar Sunday scholar, having returned from the Airforce, was irritated by the perceived abuse of church and chapel attendance by local suppliers of goods and services who, he believed, used the churches to provide opportunities to establish custom with fellow attenders.[31] Many men whom Mrs Mason knew at Five Ways Sunday school never regularly attended after returning from active service, though marriage often drew them back into occasional attendance.[32] In this respect, oral testimony reinforces the claim made at the time of World War I that 'opposition, where it exists, may be described as anti-ecclesiastical rather than anti-Christian in its character'.[33]

In addition to undermining Sunday routines, however, the latter years of the War also generated the optimism and vision of a better life for all in the post-war era. In the short term, such optimism could be harnessed and shaped by religious institutions. Mrs Cash, for example, as a teenager involved in the St Edmund's branch of the Anglican Young People's Association, was swept up in the vision and promise of a 'brave new world' and for a short time the AYPA became a vehicle for enthusiasts for Christian socialism, convinced that Christ was a socialist and that the programme for a welfare state was fundamentally and intrinsically Christian.[34] In the longer term expectations of a better life, particularly for one's children, tended to focus desires on the nuclear family, characterised by more egalitarian relationships between parents and children, and material improvements.[35] The oral tradition, which had relied on the authority of parents, was thus undermined.

<u>Secular activities</u>

It was demonstrated in chapter 2 that the churches and chapels of Dudley and Gornal, particularly the latter, remained important as providers of leisure activities, particularly during

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[30] RPMSI, G9.
[31] RPMSI, G2.
[32] RPMSI, G22.
[33] D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1919), p. 234.
[34] RPMSI, D5.
[35] For the effects of the Second World War on British mentalities and post-war expectations, see R.M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (1950); H. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1986); A. Marwick, ' People's War and Top People's Peace', in A. Sked and C. Cook (eds.), *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A.J.P. Taylor* (1976); R. Pope, *War and Society in Britain, 1899-1948* (1991).

the inter-war years. They thus remained at the hub of local communities, drawing within their influence - or at least succeeding in gaining contact with - a much wider constituency than that of their membership and regular attenders. During the post-War years this was less the case, though the declining role of the churches and chapels in providing sites for gathering, socialising and enjoying performances of various sorts was already evident during the interwar years, largely due to the huge growth in the popularity of the cinema.

The change is evident if one compares local experiences during the two wars. Whilst, during the First World War, the churches and their peripheral institutions provided important sites for gathering together, enjoying mutual support and lifting morale, by the Second World War they faced significant competition in the form of the cinema. Rousing fictional films funded by the Ministry of Information, such as *Forty-Ninth Parallel*, *Henry V*, *The Way to the Stars* and *The Way Ahead*, were immensely successful.[36] Emotional catharsis was now available in a new setting. Irritated by the success of sentimental American war films, dedicatees of documentary realism complained, 'You can sit at the Empire and hear practically the whole house weeping'.[37] A more sympathetic critic commented:

> Consciously or sub-consciously, it was the firm determination of the people to keep on top, not to let themselves get depressed, so that they could stand the bombs and bad news when they came. So they went to the pictures and were all the better for the pictures.[38]

Wesley chapel's Sunday school minute book first mentions the cinema in 1944, suggesting that it was a cause of lower attendances in the senior department.[39] Two Gornal men recently recalled the escapist benefits of the cinema: 'It was a much loved place of entertainment,' they claimed, 'and served a wonderful purpose during the war years especially, taking us away from the strife of the real world, and into a land of fantasy'.[40]

Cinemas also constituted a challenge to church and chapel buildings in terms of their imposing architectural presence and command of civic space. Unlike many of the established

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[36] Tom Harrison, cited in Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds.), *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (1987), pp. 12-13.
[37] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15.
[38] Anonymous critic quoted in *ibid.*, p. 16.
[39] Rose Hill [Wesley] Sunday School Minute Book, December 1944.
[40] John Grainger and Bob Harris, cited in *BCB*, February 1995.

civic buildings - the Town Hall, the Library, the Museum - the cinemas were very much the arena of the working class. Some cinema buildings were considered highly impressive, and their opening ceremonies reflected their prestige.

Some of the Dudley cinemas in particular were imposing and immensely popular as venues not only for regular entertainment but also for socialising. Callum Brown's description of the bingo halls which appeared in Scotland in the late 1950s - 'new excitements in palatial surroundings' - could equally be applied to the cinemas of Dudley in the inter-war years.[41] Cinemas were amongst the few grand buildings, associated with enjoyment, frequented by the working class from childhood during this period. Mr and Mrs Young, residents of the Wren's Nest Estate, both recalled some of the Dudley cinemas as 'beautiful' places,[42] whilst Mrs Carter, another Wren's Nest Estate resident who went to cinemas in Gornal and Dudley, stated that 'the Regent and the Odeon in Dudley were posh'.[43] Mr Hammond, who lived in central Dudley, considered the buildings 'impressive' and remembered the 'religious' regularity of attendance at the Regent cinema as a child:

> Oh yes. Yes, we used to go to cinema. Monday night, that was a religion, Monday night cinema [...] the Regent [...] The cinema was quite a big item in our life. [44]

By contrast, churches sometimes seemed, to non-church-goers at least, cold, clammy and uninviting.[45] Cinema opening ceremonies in Dudley were accompanied by the pomp and celebration previously reserved for civic buildings and churches or chapels. The few church or chapel stone-laying ceremonies that took place during the period were still graced by the presence of local dignitaries. At that of Priory Methodist church in 1937, for example, both the Mayor and the Earl of Dudley spoke. The completed buildings were, however, architecturally modest affairs, compared with the older Anglican churches and the grand chapel buildings of

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[41] Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 167. By the 1960s, when cinemas locally, as elsewhere, were being converted into bingo clubs, the latter attracted large numbers to special events (such as a first anniversary dance in 1961 for the Gaumont Bingo Club when 260 members attended the Queen Mary Ballroom: *DH*, 29 September 1962).

[42] RPMSI, D30.

[43] RPMSI, D4. See Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, pp. 144-46 for a description of the cinemas.

[44] RPMSI, D16.

Victorian Dudley (such as King Street Congregational chapel, King Street Wesleyan chapel and 'Wesley' United Methodist chapel Wolverhampton Street),[46] unlikely to inspire awe or pride in any but those who had been loyal supporters of the enterprises. Stone-laying ceremonies and opening services scarcely competed in scale with some of the opening ceremonies of the grander cinemas, which attracted a level of popular attention, to the like of which the local churches could not aspire. The stone-laying ceremony for St Christopher's church on a Saturday afternoon in November 1938, for example, attracted a respectable but relatively modest gathering of 160.[47]

The re-opening of the Criterion in 1923, re-built in a grand Italianate-style, marked the arrival of the cinema in Dudley as a rival to the churches not only in terms of provision of alternative leisure facilities but also as a site of civic symbolism and social respectability. The ceremony included film footage of local Mayoral Sunday celebrations, and was attended by Viscount Ednam, the Mayor and an alderman. With its own cafe open all day, the Criterion became a respectable social centre, characterised in the words of the historian of Black Country cinemas, in a phrase significantly reminiscent of the self-image of many local twentieth-century churches, by a 'happy family atmosphere'. The Odeon on Castle Hill also opened to the accompaniment of civic pomp in the person of Alderman, and former Mayor, Joseph Hillman.[48] At the opening of the Plaza in 1937 the cinema, with an initial capacity of a thousand was full, whilst crowds lined Castle Hill outside.[49] Cinemas also served increasingly as venues for events which would previously have been held under the roofs of church and chapel buildings. When the Mayoress, Mrs T.E. Bennett, wanted to stage a Christmas party for servicemen's children

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[45] e.g. Mr and Mrs Tomlins (RPMSI, G29).
[46] For Victorian Nonconformist architectural grandeur, see Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920* (1977).
[47] St Christopher's Wren's Nest, Dudley Service Registers, 1937-1965, November 1938.
[48] Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, pp. 143-49.
[49] *DH*, 31 July 1937.

in 1943, for example, she chose a cinema, the friendly and capacious Plaza, and entertained 1350 children.[50]

The cinemas also independently provided 'improving' recreation, a role previously very much the domain of the churches and chapels. Children's clubs at cinemas - which could attract membership of over a thousand[51] - sometimes adopted a quasi-religious moral educational role. In 1937, for example, the Dudley Odeon's Mickey Mouse Club not only put on entertainments but also taught children to undertake charitable work and do periodic good deeds.[52] The Dudley Odeon Car Club, founded in 1938, took on a charity role, staging a Sunday night charity concert at the Odeon Theatre attended by 1700 with proceeds towards the Odeon District Old Folks' Christmas Treat, to which 1200 came.[53]

By 1945, in Gornal as well as in Dudley, it was not only the cinemas that were providing alternatives to church- and chapel-initiated entertainments. It was increasingly the case that new local groups were being formed independently of the churches. In February 1945, for example, a Lower Gornal Dramatic Society gave its first performance at the Memorial Hall, whilst first mention is made of a Gornal Little Theatre Group performing at the Memorial Hall in 1949.[54] Such groups did not always use the churches' and chapels' facilities for performances. In December 1945, for example, the Upper Gornal Male Voice Choir was formed and gave its debut concert at the Labour Club on Clarence Street.[55] Moreover, the new Miners' Welfare Club, in particular, increasingly served as an alternative venue, or as a venue for activities and entertainments which would not have been allowed by the churches and chapels. In 1941, soon after its completion, the Welfare Club put on a concert to a large

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[50] *DH*, 25 December 1943.

[51] e.g. the Criterion Minors' Club had a membership of over a thousand by 1941 (Williams, *Cinemas of the Black Country*, pp. 147-49).

[52] *DH*, 25 September 1937.

[53] *DH*, 21 January 1939. During the post-War years, the cinemas ran Christmas Appeals with collections from patrons of the cinemas and, later, the bingo clubs, for children and old people, with distribution assisted by organised charities such as the NSPCC (e.g. *DH*, 15 December 1961).

[54] *DH*, 3 February 1945 and 23 April 1949.

audience, whilst by 1943 the Club was able to offer the patrons the added attraction of 'smoking concerts'.[56] And in March 1965, the first night of wrestling at the Club attracted a full house.[57]

Local youth in Dudley and Gornal were provided with a far greater range of leisure activities unconnected with local churches and chapels during the post-War period than had been the case during the inter-War years. In 1943, a Youth Committee was formed for the Dudley Corporation to co-ordinate the work of the town's many youth clubs.[58] At the time, the majority were still largely self-supporting, often run by churches and chapels, but committees of the town's corporation began to provide some facilities and non-church or chapel youth clubs presented counter-attractions with which the churches were struggling to compete by the end of the period. Mr Savage, a lifelong attender at St James's Lower Gornal, recalled the rapid decline of the church's youth club following the founding of a local council youth club in the mid-1960s:

> Yes [we had] quite a strong youth club for a time [...] the youth club went on till the 1960's til the new club built by council started in Temple Street and the church couldn't compete with that.[59]

Outdoor sports were also increasingly organised independently of churches and chapels, which had previously had their own football and cricket teams, and by the 1960s youths were confident enough to form their own teams and find venues for matches.[60]

The elderly were also beginning to be provided for outside the direct provision of the churches by the later years of our period, even if those who were involved in running the new groups were often church and chapel people who infused an atmosphere of relaxed and friendly

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[55] *DH*, 1 December 1945. The Labour Club, which functioned largely as a social club and pub, was housed in a building which was, until 1929, a doctor's surgery. Previously, the Labour Club had met at Ruiton Congregational chapel (*DH*, 7 September 1929 and RMPSI, G9).

[56] *DH*, 8 March 1941 and 20 March 1943.

[57] *DH*, 20 March 1965.

[58] *DH*, 4 October 1947.

[59] RPMSI, G27.

[60] In autumn 1961, for example, the local press reported that a group of lads had formed their own football club, Castle United F.C., renting rooms at Rosland Schools and a pitch at the County Ground (*DH*, 3 November 1961).

religiosity into the weekly meetings of the new groups. In March 1957, for example, Lower Gornal's Darby and Joan Club, Abbey Street, was completed,[61] and has provided regular weekly meetings for the elderly ever since. In Dudley, bingo clubs, converted from cinemas, provided regular opportunities for hundreds to socialise and enjoy gentle excitement.[62]

By 1963, Dudley and Gornal could boast a number of clubs and organisations which were not formally linked with any of the churches and chapels, catering for youth, adults and the elderly, and providing facilities and opportunities for a variety of sporting activities and for socialising.[63] Many of these had come into existence since the War.

Childhood, home and the changing family

Despite the continued popularity of certain special church services demonstrated in chapter 3, there has been a decrease in regular church attendance and, particularly during the later years of the period, in occasional involvement at special services. Nevertheless, the testimony of a majority of interviewees suggests that sustained involvement in religious activities as children and the teachings and practices of parents provided the foundations for adult religious beliefs. Whilst childhood involvement was often followed by withdrawal from regular religious activity in young adulthood, private religious practices, beliefs and behaviour were not automatically discarded. Occasional involvement was usually sustained (or renewed through one's children) and mature adults often returned to their childhood experiences, perhaps somewhat nostalgically, as a reservoir of unsullied beliefs and attitudes and as the site of their own identity formations.

Some interviewees, however, particularly residents on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates, had experienced minimal contact with institutional religion since, or even during, childhood. Combined with a lack of regular religious practices in the home, either as a child or as an adult, a prolonged absence from any form of public worship has, amongst such interviewees, reduced the daily relevance of issues relating to religious belief. Such concerns simply have not been important. Clergymen certainly perceived local children in such terms

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[61] *DH*, 23 March 1957.
[62] E.g. *DH*, 4 August 1961.
[63] *Sedgley: The Official Guide* (1963), pp. 35-9.

during the post-war years. In 1959, for example, the incumbent of St Edmund's commented on what he perceived to be the relationship between the prevalence of crime and the lack of an active Christian faith, 'a marked feature of these present days'. The 'apathy' of former days, he claimed, was tempered by the fact that many, despite failing to fulfil the duty of worship, were so influenced by Christian tradition as to conform to Christian standards of conduct. Amongst the younger generation, he continued, many were 'utterly ignorant of and [...] entirely uninfluenced by the Christian religion', evidence of which he found in the fact that in 1958, half of the boys in a class of a local school had never been inside a church. The result, he believed, was materialism and the absence of a sense of moral duty. [64]

It is, of course, possible to argue that a lack of involvement in religious worship and private practices could result from, rather than generate, a lack of religious belief. Certainly, the testimony of some interviewees suggests that the absence at any time in their lives of strong religious convictions, popular or orthodox, institutional or domestic, would not have predisposed them to religious practice. But whilst such interviewees sometimes expressed hostility towards churchgoers, they rarely expressed any overt hostility to, or total rejection of, the metaphysical claims of orthodox or popular religion. The response was more one of indifferent agnosticism and a tendency, in the context of the interview, to talk more extensively about other concerns.

Mrs Heath, for example, born in 1911 in Stafford Street, central Dudley, a resident of the Wren's Nest Estate from 1935, was brought up by her mother, after her father was killed in the First World War. Her mother did not attend church, did not teach Mrs Heath to say prayers at home or insist that she attended Sunday school. As a child she only occasionally attended Sunday school at 'Wesley' Wolverhampton Street and thereafter never attended church again except for marriages, christenings and funerals. She never read the Bible, had no favourite hymns and, although she had prayed to 'the Lord' since her husband's death, she claimed never to have thought of death as anything other than 'the end'. She never taught her daughter to say her prayers or encouraged or discouraged her to attend Sunday school.

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[64] *St Edmund, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, May 1959.

Mrs Heath married a man who was equally divorced from any institutional religious involvement and they both regarded churchgoers in general as hypocrites who attended church out of snobbery. Religion was associated with such people. Their own concerns were more immediate and mundane:

> He said if anything happens to me first and I hope it does, keep yourself all right, look after your little home and don't let them rope you in, don't let them rope you in church. I said that won't happen, they won't rope me in.[65]

For Mrs Heath religious questions have not been amongst the most important issues in life. Or, to adopt Luckmann's functionalist definition of religion, Mrs Heath's 'religion' (ultimate values) has been worldly rather than superempirical. Her main concerns, like those of a number of other interviewees, have centred on the home and the family and the occasions on which she spoke about the successes of her children and grandchildren, and her wish that she had enough money to buy her grandson a car, were amongst the few times she became enthused.[66]

Between the Wars the family home was becoming a major site of leisure, at the expense of various forms of social gathering, largely as a result of the popularity of the wireless set, a feature of nine homes out of ten by World War II.[67] By the end of our period, local clergy occasionally commented on the way in which the family had attained a quasi-religious significance. Reverend Peter Hutchings, minister at Dixon's Green Methodist chapel in Dudley, spoke of people turning to home as 'an earthly paradise'.[68] Oral evidence provides some support for such claims. Asked what they had considered the most important issue in life, eighteen respondents (out of 40 who were asked the question), including regular and irregular churchgoers, identified the family and/or the relationship between husband and wife. Mr Lewis, for example, a regular Methodist for the last 30 years, stated that for him the most important thing in life 'is the upbringing of a family life, you've got to have a happy family and got to begin with loving parents, they shower all the love upon you'.[69] Mr and Mrs Tomlins agreed

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[65] RPMSI, D18.
[66] Cf. RPMSI, G28; RPMSI, G1.
[67] A.J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 384-85.
[68] *DH*, 2 November 1963.
[69] RPMSI, D21.

that love was the most important thing in life and Mrs Tomlins added that 'you get the best out of your family and my children were a very loveable family'.[70]

For two of the three interviewees who openly expressed total scepticism about the metaphysical claims of Christianity, the emotional centre of life, in Luckmann's terms the site of 'ultimate value', had more emphatically become the spouse and the family. Mr Tomlins, who was brought up in a Strict Baptist family in Lower Gornal, contrasted the priorities of chapel people, with his own family-oriented values:

> The thing is what they do, they love God more than they love them own families. There's only one love as they think, the love of God. They forget about the love of the wife and the love of the children and the love of the family and relations and everybody round them. They forget all about that. There's only one love that they've got and that's the love of God. And that's only for their self. I think they do become very, very selfish people.[71]

Mr Davis, also brought up in a Lower Gornal Strict Baptist family, similarly focused on the central importance of the relationship of husband and wife, though he continued to draw directly and undisguisedly on the moral authority of Christian teaching:

> Like my father I used to talk about the Epistles, more on that line [...] The main tenets of faith are the Epistles [...] I remember a discussion with them once about the Epistle [...] where Paul said 'A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be as one'.[72]

Mrs Beattie, born in 1915 in central Dudley, moved to the Wren's Nest Estate in 1935 and thereafter had little involvement with institutional religion. She, like Mrs Heath, always believed there was a God, but did not believe in an afterlife, nor in the efficacy of prayer, and was sceptical about the possibility of manipulating one's luck. Of such matters she stated simply, 'I've never had time to think much about it you know'. She was inclined towards a fatalism which, whilst arguably an important form of popular religiosity in itself, precluded an interest in religious questions: 'The way I look at it, yom fated for someat and that's it'. For her, the most important issues in life revolved around 'helping people out in need [...] Family and that. All through me life. If they were in any trouble or that'.[73] Such values were more

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[70] RPMSI, G29.
[71] RPMSI, G29.
[72] RPMSI, G9.
[73] RPMSI, D1.

typical of interviewees who, like those living on the new housing estates, had spent much of their adult life living in areas with weaker neighbourhood and communal ties than was characteristic of the more established working-class residential areas. Mogey's conclusion about a housing estate near Oxford in the 1950s is applicable: 'The estate family in its new bureaucratic landscape was more intuned on itself and can be said to be family centred'.[74]

But in important respects the change was more widely applicable in the post-war years, with a more child-centred approach to family becoming widely popular, and a widespread desire that one's children should have a better life than one had experienced oneself.[75] The intensification of family bonds has been accompanied by an apparently contradictory trend: parents increasingly treated their children as autonomous individuals with a right to make their own choices rather than as dependants subject to their own authority. The family structure became less rigidly hierarchical, more intimate, going separate ways for much of its time but valuing highly those times of coming together. Sunday was an important such time and was devoted to family activities.

Mrs Cash, who had children during the 1950s, felt that she was considerably less strict with her children than her parents had been with her about general behaviour, though not about church attendance: 'I think it was the 1950s and early 60s and it was in the air'.[76] Mrs Hood similarly recalled being less strict with her children than her parents had been with her: 'we started all this silly business about thinking we were going to give our children more and better than we'd ever had'.[77] Sociologists have argued that middle-class parents adopt 'developmental' models of child-rearing, encouraging children to 'be eager to learn, to love and confide in the parents, to be happy, to share and cooperate', whilst working-class parents adopt a 'traditional' model, encouraging children 'to be neat and clean, to obey and respect adults, to please adults'.[78] To a certain extent, such apparent changes in attitudes towards parenting

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[74] Mogey, *Family and Neighbourhood: Two Studies in Oxford* (Oxford, 1956), p. 75.
[75] Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 142-43.
[76] RPMSI, D5.
[77] RPMSI, G15.
[78] M.L. Kohn, 'Social Class and Parent-Child Relationships', in Michael Anderson (ed.), *Sociology of the Family* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 323-38 (p.328). Kohn cites the work of Evelyn Millis Duvall, whose work, like that of Kohn, was on the family in the United States. Richard Hoggart, writing in the 1950s, depicts a rather more indulgent attitude to parenting among the working-class: *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp.52-3. Theories of the psychology of

might have been the product of upward social mobility amongst some interviewees. Mrs Cash, for example, was born into a working-class Dudley family but became a primary school teacher and married an accountant. But the change in parental attitudes was also characteristic of many interviewees who remained firmly working-class as adults. Mr and Mrs Tomlins, for example, were both born working-class and remained so, but contrasted their own strict upbringings with their attitudes to their own children:

> John and I have always let them do what they want to do, providing we know it's right. We've never disagreed in anything they've ever done, none of them [...] I think it's wrong to force a child to do anything [...] we've never been strict with them, because I think if you're strict they turn out sly and we've never had trouble with our children.[79]

If the belief that it was appropriate for children to be involved in religious activities was widespread throughout the period, changes in attitudes to parental authority and the autonomy of children were beginning to have a serious effect on the nature and extent of popular religious practice by the post-war years. Local clergymen believed they identified such a change early in the post-war years. The curate of St Christopher's church on the Wren's Nest estate wrote in July 1947 of the importance of the family for passing on religious practices to the next generation but concluded that many miss the opportunity due to the 'reluctance of the present generation to interfere with the freedom of young people's choice'.[80] Mrs Griffiths

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personality formation have been deployed to argue that the experiences of upbringing are critically influenced by social class and that middle-class individualism and working-class collectivism produce divergent experiences of religiosity. Discussing the binary model of religiosity proposed by J. Dittes, in which a diffuse/personal religion which constitutes part of the personality structure and shapes the total behaviour of the believer (i.e. personalised life-orientation) is contrasted with an explicit/circumscribed religion which is keyed to dogma and ritual in the public sphere and only applicable to specific segments of human conduct, C.J.M. Donders argues that the processes of individuation which Freud identified were in fact characteristic only of bourgeois upbringing and subsequent experience; they have not, Donders argues, been the experience of the working class(es) wherein upbringing has conformed more closely to folk traditions, expectations and behaviour patterns, so that 'a popular (or non-bourgeois) upbringing is more likely to bring about similarity between culture and personality structure than a bourgeois one aimed at the development of individuality'. The cultural construction of the working-class mentality is essentially collectivist whilst that of the middle class is individualist (C.J.M. Donders, 'Some Psychological Remarks on Official and Popular Religion', in Vrijhof and Waardenburg (eds.), *Official and Popular Religion*, pp.294-322 (pp.312-16). Donders cites J. Dittes, 'Psychology of Religion' in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (1969).

[79] RPMSI, G29.

[80] *St Francis and St Christopher Parish Magazine*, July 1947.

recalled the difference between her own attitudes to child-rearing and those of her parents and grandparents:

> I think it probably was when I started thinking back to my early childhood, how hard it was [...] I wonder sometimes how, when I did find time to play because [...] I always seemed to be working [...] So when I had my children I decided they were never going to have - they were brought up strict, they didn't get away with anything - but they weren't made to do chores like we were made to do chores.

Q. Did you insist they go to Sunday school?

> If they really didn't want to I wouldn't force them.[81]

Many parents, regular and irregular churchgoers alike, no longer insisted on the observance of practices which their own parents had insisted on with them, feeling that 'it's wrong to force them'.[82] Sunday school figures had dropped rapidly by the 1960s[83] and local clergymen frequently lamented the passing of the days when parents could be relied upon to support the work of the churches at least by sending their children to Sunday school and by teaching them to say their prayers at home.[84] In 1964 the Zoar chapel correspondent for the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church council questioned whether 'parents are quite so keen as they used to be, in sending their youngsters to Sunday School' and added that alternatives to Sunday School and church attendance in the forms of television, motor cars, Sunday games and entertainments, combined to contribute to the decline of Sunday School attendance.[85] The previous year, Reverend Charles Elliott, Vicar of St James's Lower Gornal, made a similar observation:

> There was a time when the Sunday School teachers simply taught and kept a record of attendances. They could be sure of a home discipline which included the parents sending their children week by week. Alas this can no longer be taken for granted. What we need now, are good visitors who will regularly keep in touch with the children.[86]

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[81] RPMSI, D10. Cf. LOHA interviewees, e.g. Mr W5L, Mr K2P, Mr M7P.
[82] e.g. RPMSI, D10, D16, D23, D30, G2 G5, G9, G12, G26, G29.
[83] e.g. by 1964, the outdoor procession of St Edmund's Sunday school Festival was abandoned because 'there really does not seem to be a Procession to be led!', a position apparently reflected in many other local churches (*St Edmund, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, June 1964). Cf. *St Francis and St Christopher Parish Magazine*, May 1964.
[84] Cf. Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (1993), pp. 201-06, who notes that, after World War II, for the first time the majority of children were not regular Sunday Scholars and concluded that as a result 'a broad spectrum of Christian beliefs in any recognisable form is unlikely to persist in the general population'.
[85] *The Messenger*, June 1964.
[86] *Saint James the Great, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, May 1963.

Elliott contrasted modern with older parental attitudes to discipline and authority in the family, and its effects on Sunday school attendance:

> There is a tendency in many quarters today to write-off Sunday Schools as being finished [...] It is certainly true that the 300 to 400 strong Sunday Schools, which thrived in many parishes like ours between the Wars, are now almost without exception just fond memories [...] How many times have you heard it said, or even said it yourself "In my day we were made to go twice every Sunday, and if we didn't we got a good hiding". Parents don't hand out good hidings for non-attendance at Church or Sunday School these days. All too often they take the opposite view, "I let mine please themselves whether they go or not. It will be better in the long run if they make up their own minds about it".[87]

Whilst the primary departments of Sunday schools tended to continue to fare well, indicating that many parents still felt that it was appropriate to send young children to Sunday School, departments for older children struggled. The Zoar chapel correspondent for the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council referred to its 'very well attended primary dept. [*sic*]' but noted that Zoar, along with other chapels, suffered declining overall Sunday School numbers and pondered the means to reverse the trend.[88] Many parents no longer insisted on attendance as their children reached an age at which they were considered capable of making their own decisions. It seems that in the post-war years, the 'developmental' model of child-rearing was penetrating the working class. Children increasingly enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy and independence, as Elizabeth Roberts has argued.[89] Many children chose to stop attending at an earlier age (often before entering their teens) and peer pressure, or the departure of friends from Sunday school, accelerated the trend. Mr Hammond explained:

> I tell you this, when I was little I was made to go to Sunday school and sometimes I hated it. And I always said I would give them - if I ever had any children - I would give them the choice.[90]

Mr and Mrs Young, Wren's Nest Estate residents, who had children in the 1950s and 1960s, explained the absence of a strict observance of Sunday in their own house by reference to their hopes for their children, and contrasted their own attitudes with those of their own parents.

Mr It changed when you had your children. Because you think you deprive them of what they like by saying you can't do this, you can't do that, you've got that in your mind.

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[87] *Ibid.*.
[88] *The Messenger*, January 1965.
[89] Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp. 47-9.
[90] RPMSI, D16.

Mrs Our parents used to be stricter.[91]

Mr and Mrs Hood, both lifelong worshippers at Ruiton Congregational chapel, married in 1945 and started a family soon afterwards. They attributed their children's lack of adult involvement in church at least in part to their own attitudes to bringing up children, though they are justifiably proud of the successful careers which their offspring now pursue:

> basically I think myself, we started cushioning children more than we'd ever been cushioned [...] they went to Sunday school, until they got about 14, when they, well they didn't because our children went to University. But when they get about 14, [...] well, they were studying, they were studying for A' levels and things like that. O' levels and A' levels.[92]

These were priorities which at least some of the churches came to accept during the post-war years. A report to St Luke's PCC in February 1954, for example, stressed that 'whilst the Junior Fellowship is doing very well we must all appreciate that night-school has first call on the youth'.[93]

Weakened ties with Sunday school in turn tended to undermine the tradition of occasional attendance which, as chapter 3 has shown, was partly based on a sense of belonging to a church or chapel by virtue of childhood attendance. By the end of the 1960s such changes were being noticed in the local churches and chapels. The Free Church Council correspondent of Mount Zion chapel, Upper Gornal, commented in 1969 on the slow but steady annual decrease in attendances at the Sunday School Anniversaries:

> It does seem noticeable that over the years numbers of people attending our Anniversary services have gone down [...this] no doubt is symptomatic of the loosening of ties with Sunday-school and church which seems to be affecting each new generation of nominal adherents.[94]

The formerly common practice of parents teaching their children to say their prayers was also waning during the post-war years. Interviewees whose parents had taught them to pray were, in several cases, considerably less assiduous in ensuring that the practice was instilled in their own children, feeling that this too was an imposition.[95] Even children who

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[91] RPMSI, D30.
[92] RPMSI, G15.
[93] St Luke's Parish Church Council Minutes, 9 February 1954.
[94] *The Messanger*, June 1969.
[95] e.g. RPMSI, D16, D23, G4.

remained involved in church well into their teens - the majority - had not acquired habits of prayer at home. The incumbent of St Luke's Dudley commented in 1966 of his confirmation class students that when asked how many prayed every day, almost all hands would go up, but when asked how many prayed at home privately only one or two would, most only doing so in school prayer.[96]

An emphasis on the importance of the close-knit loving nuclear family and new attitudes to the child-rearing among the working class also tended to weaken certain, though not all, traditions of popular religious belief. Certain aspects of popular religious belief and experience - the belief that it was possible to enjoy contact with the spirits of departed family members, for example - may have been reinforced by the emphasis on the nuclear family as the emotional centre of life. But the exercise of parental authority, which had been an important component of the transmission of many popular religious beliefs, underwent changes, particularly in the post-war years, which tended to weaken the hold of popular religious beliefs and practices.

Mr and Mrs Young, of the Wren's Nest Estate, did not pass on all of their religious beliefs to their children (which they would have regarded as an imposition). As a result, their own children have not retained the practices and beliefs which have formed a significant part of their own lives. In certain cases - particularly the failure of their children to observe traditional rites of passage rituals, particularly christenings - this has been a source of grievance to Mr and Mrs Young who still regard such ceremonies as proper. In the case of many popular beliefs and superstitions, however, the process of transmission from generation to generation, guaranteed by stricter parental authority, had previously served as a re-affirmation of their truth for the older generation as well as informing the younger generation. That such beliefs were not passed on to their own children, whose own needs and wants shaped parental priorities, meant not only that the younger generation did not inherit them, but also that they often lost their significance for the parental generation:

Mrs We were [superstitious] then, because you had it off your parents didn't you [...] years ago our parents was very superstitious. I know my mom was [...] You see, you don't teach them to

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[96] *St Luke Parish Magazine*, July 1966.

your children and you forget them yourself as well. I think it's like the younger generation. They grow up. They don't do it and you forget all about it sort of thing.

Mr When you've got children, you've got your mind on the children more so than these things.

Mrs What they want, you know.

Mr You never used to tell your children the traditions or beliefs that our parents told us. Bad luck for this, bad luck for that. Because today, they don't believe in things like that [...]

Mrs I doubt whether our Christopher ever knew things like that [...]

Mr If you was to say anything to him now, he'd laugh at you.[97]

Working-class parents locally, as nationally, in the post-war years were less inclined to regard their role as one of preparing their children for a life similar to their own, in working-class occupations, and accepting their lot, and were more inclined to have more ambitious aspirations for them.[98] In a 1955 Gallup poll, 54% of respondents said that they would not like any son of theirs to follow their own (or their husband's) line of work, whilst only 26% said they would. Nearly half of those who stated they would prefer their son to follow a different line of work identified 'the professions' as the preferred career path.[99] An attitude which concentrated on the potential for improvement, change and the future, rather than continuity, stability and the past, was unconducive to the continued vitality of many popular religious beliefs and of practices which sustained and reinforced those beliefs.

If the emotional bonds of family were intensified, this did not inevitably lead to the disappearance of superstitious or quasi-superstitious beliefs. Some old popular beliefs were reshaped and invested with idiosyncratic and personal meanings, hallowed by the sanctity of the family, replacing their traditional communal meanings. Mrs Childs's claims to scepticism about traditional superstitions, accompanied by a long account of how the number 13 had been lucky for her in several important and personal respects suggest that superstitions may have been becoming more credible when personalised and intricately bound up with familial relationships, and less credible when impersonal, devoid of any experiential basis and reliant solely upon traditional authority. There is some similar evidence in relation to the meanings attributed to objects of the transformation of a traditional form of folk religiosity into an informal practice

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[97] RPMSI, D30.

[98] This is not, of course, a trend exclusive to the post-War years, as Richard Hoggart's account of his own childhood makes clear (Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, p.26), but does seem to have accelerated during these years.

[99] George H. Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975, Volume 1, 1937-1964* (New York, 1976), p. 341.

which drew on the emotional intensity of family bonds. Mrs Griffin, whose early years were spent in a police orphanage and who, at the age of 11, moved back to Dudley to live on the Priory Estate did not recall ever having a lucky charm or mascot but continued:

> I'm more likely - I've got a pension book mum used to have - that type of thing, that's the sort of thing I may value. The type that belonged to somebody else, like when I got married I wore mum's earrings because I feel as though the spirit somehow, so that is slightly superstitious. [Her husband's] mother's earrings I wear as well and I feel as though they're part of the whole, part of my past and so somehow they've got to come with me.[100]

Rather than having any overtly magical qualities, it is as though the object functions as a spiritual synecdoche, drawing past and present together in the form of family ties across generations, and particularly important at moments of rites of passage with the extension of the family through, in this case, marriage.

It could be argued that the churches increasingly reinforced the notion that the family was, and ought to be, the site of ultimate concern. In 1955 the Reverend R.N. Timms of St James's, Lower Gornal, reflected on the local popularity in recent years of the Mothering Sunday service and emphasised the centrality of the family in a modern world threatened by mass destruction, concluding that the best protection against the consequent modern angst was 'the teaching and the practice of the wonder and the loveliness of happy home life'.[101] Denominational concerns also served to reinforce this pre-occupation with the family. In 1962, Anglican churches in Dudley and Gornal observed the Christian Family Year initiative, a response to rising divorce rates and perceptions of a general breakdown of the nuclear family, intended to revitalise family life through a programme of local service and total-family activities. Parishioners of Lower Gornal were introduced to the initiative by an article in the parish magazine and urged to extend to the whole family, activities habitually undertaken by a single family member: private prayer should become family prayer and Sunday worship become a family observance. The writer concluded, however, by adding that CFY was concerned not just with such matters since 'There is no endeavour that is not done better together as a family than individually'.[102]

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[100] RPMSI, D11 (Mrs Griffin).
[101] *Saint James the Great, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, March 1955.
[102] *Saint James the Great, Lower Gornal, Parish Magazine*, May 1962.

The churches increasingly sought to promote themselves as families and the discourse employed in particular within parish magazines was characterised most noticeably in the post-war years by the attempt to create a familial tone. Christ's warning that one must leave all behind to follow him had, it would seem, become anathema in the context of perceived family breakdown.[103] In seeking to present itself as a family, the church rendered itself largely redundant to those who experienced the warmth and love of their own nuclear families, although in the absence of such a family, or in the event of its breakdown, the church could indeed become a vital surrogate family.[104] On the whole, the churches probably reinforced the growing sense that the family was the inner sanctum, the arena within which one's ultimate hopes and aspirations, as well as one's greatest pains and joys, were played out.

Neighbourhood And Community:

The increasingly inward-looking family was partly a product of the disruption of local working-class neighbourhoods and communities, a process which, as chapter 2 has shown, was characteristic of Dudley. The slum clearances of the 1930s and the large-scale movement of the population to the new Priory and Wren's Nest Estates quickly undermined religious practice and, in the long term, weakened religious belief. The resulting problems for the older churches were far from unique to Dudley. An undated Mass-Observation report observed that

> An important practical reason for the decline in attendance at older churches is the moving out of population to outskirts of the town, while richer citizens may leave the town altogether.[105]

Locally, the town centre churches suffered a drop in adult and Sunday school attendances as a result of the clearances and re-housing schemes both in the 1930s and later, with the construction of the Russell's Hall Estate, in the 1950s.[106] But the move to the new estates from

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[103] The wedge driven into the family is part of the Christian inheritance (Matthew 10: 35-37). Cf. Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life* (New York, 1961), pp. 221-22.

[104] e.g. RPMSI, D6.

[105] M-O A: TC Religion, 2, 2D.

[106] e.g. *DH*, 23 January 1937; St Luke's PCC Minutes, 16 March 1958; *St Luke, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, July 1960; *St Thomas, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, June 1961.

established neighbourhoods with allegiances to local churches also meant, for many of the inhabitants, the end of any regular associational involvement. Interviewees identified their own or their parents' distancing from involvement in church or Sunday school to the time their families moved to the estates, or soon afterwards.[107] The main exceptions seem to have been those whose streets were cleared and moved together as neighbours on the new estate, though these were a small minority.[108] As a result, there was little sense of belonging to a local church, or of the local church or its minister being wholly integrated within the community. Church property was regularly vandalised. Alan Hayward, curate at St Christopher's on the Wren's Nest Estate from 1956 to 1959, recalled the first occasion on which he walked the streets of the estate and was hit by stones thrown by boys. Asked for an explanation, the boys replied 'We always throw stones at vicars'.[109] Whilst Sunday school attendance was the norm in Gornal and had been so in the old town centre parts of Gornal, children who attended Sunday school on the Priory and Wren's Nest estates were in a small minority and often found themselves the butt of their local friends' mockery.[110]

There is also evidence that post-war conditions - with an accelerated dislocation of local neighbourhoods and communities through slum clearance, re-housing and increased mobility - tended to undermine the applicability and hence ultimately the strength of the emphasis within popular religion on neighbourliness and good deeds. These changes combined with a welfare net which produced greater post-war affluence amongst the working class locally, as well as nationally, as chapter 2 has shown.[111] Amongst those who had moved several times from one area to another, or who had lived in new council housing areas where, as previous chapters have argued, community spirit was weak due to the disruption of older kinship and neighbourhood ties, there was a rather different - more negative - ideal of the Christian life, less concerned with the Good Samaritan and more concerned with the privacy of

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[107] e.g. RPMSI, D1, D3, D4 (Mr Carter), D25 (Mr Smart), D26, D30 (Mr Young).
[108] RPMSI, D30 (Mrs Young).
[109] Personal communication with the author by telephone, unrecorded.
[110] e.g. RPMSI, D6 and D23.
[111] Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1969: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (1994), pp. 22-25. Bourke cites the study of Rowntree and Lavers, *Poverty and the Welfare State*, to argue that post-War welfare legislation put many more working people clear of the imminent threat of poverty in a way which was unthinkable before the War.

the home. In the early 1950s, Geoffrey Gorer found a large proportion of his respondents to a national survey felt that the ideal neighbour kept himself to himself.[112]

A report on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates in the 1950s noted: 'Its inhabitants do tend [...] to have fewer friends and relatives in the same street than the average for the borough'. In fact 85% had no relatives and 70% no friends in the same street, compared with 70% and 50% in an older part of the town, Kate's Hill; 30% stated they would have preferred different neighbours.[113] Some of the views of Elizabeth Roberts's interviewees as to what constituted 'being religious' illustrate the point. Mr W6L, for example, born in Lancaster in 1931, stated 'I'm a Christian in my own way. I don't do anybody any harm'.[114] Mr Beddoe, born in 1921 in Lower Gornal, the son of a construction foreman for the local firm of Gibbons, grew up in Gornal and attended Lake Street Primitive Methodist chapel Sunday School, but as an adult moved to different parts of the Black Country and spent some time working abroad, having little regular contact with associational religion. The difference between what he recalled to be his childhood understanding of Christianity and that which informed his adult view illustrates the change. As a child, 'well, it was more or less at that time sort of honesty. And being able to rely on people'. As an adult the moral code remained part of his conception of Christianity but the neighbourly ethic had been replaced by a more private one:

> People who live righteously, try not to make things hard for other people to do. Just sort of living, trying to live your own life and not interfering with other people and letting them get on with their life.[115]

The attitude of Mrs Smart of the Priory Estate to people from the church asking whether her children would attend Sunday school, reflects the increasing wish for privacy and non-interference as well as more liberal attitudes to children:

> They came round asking many a time, but I always said, 'It's their lives. They'll live it their way'. It's up to them. I don't like people interfering in mine so that's it.[116]

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[112] G. Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (1955), pp. 200-02.
[113] T.S. Simey,. *Social Aspects of a Town Development Plan: A Study of the County Borough of Dudley* (Liverpool, 1951), pp. 42-3 and 156-58.
[114] Mr W6L, pp. 36-9.
[115] RPMSI, G4.
[116] RPMSI, D25.

The contrasting experiences of neighbourly support experienced by Mrs Childs reinforce the sense that the strong bonds of community which provided the opportunity for a social expression of practical Christianity had weakened by the 1960s even in the Gornals. As a child in the 1920s, she grew up in Pale Street, Upper Gornal (known locally as 'Pale Peace' because 'Everybody loved one another in the street'[117]) and recalled her mother's unstinting assistance to sick neighbours, or their children: 'My Mom used to be back and forth night and day if she was wanted'.[118] Forty years later, when her mother was sick and slowly dying, Mrs Childs and her husband paid two neighbours 10s a night to sit with her mother, and her aunt recommended that they should seek help from social services, which they duly did.[119]

The older communities, in addition to fostering a spirit of neighbourly help, had also served to police local behaviour, forcing such activities as illegal gambling to take place out of sight in public houses, as was the case in Gornal. On the new housing estates, by contrast, there was no tight-knit community to uphold such standards and the code of personal ethics which informed the lives of those more integrated within the diffusive Christian culture held less sway on the new estates. Uprooted and poor, many had experienced little involvement with organised religion since their Sunday schooling was curtailed when they moved to the estates. Without any personal extensive Sunday schooling, they often took little interest in the religious and spiritual education of their own children. The Wren's Nest Estate was known for the popularity of gambling, and the churches and public authorities occasionally publicly condemned it and took measures against it. In March 1948, for example, Reverend Wakeling, Vicar of St Francis's, commented on the problem at a meeting of local civic and religious leaders at the Wren's Nest school. There was, he claimed, much gambling in the streets and a Sunday scholar from the Wren's Nest had seen men gambling on church grounds when coming out of the Sunday school.[120] Drunkenness, fighting and vandalism (including frequent damage to church property) were also regularly reported in the local press.[121]

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[117] RPMSI, G7.
[118] Manuscript autobiography of Mrs Childs (RPMSI, G7), kindly loaned to the author, p. 3.
[119] *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.
[120] *DH*, 27 March 1948. For gambling on the streets, including on Sundays, see RPMSI, D26.
[121] e.g. *DH*, 28 February 1931, 16 October 1937, 14 April 1962; also RPMSI, D4 (Mr and Mrs Carter).

The destruction of older established communities was also a factor contributing to the weakening of popular religious beliefs relating to the superempirical realm. John Wolffe has argued that, whilst the evidence remains scanty, folk religion almost certainly declined between 1945 and 1990 since

> such forms of belief are dependent for their vitality on closely-knit and relatively stable communities, where they can be transmitted and practised. Such traditional social patterns had already been eroded considerably by 1945, and continued to decline during the subsequent decades, leaving isolated and conservative communities such as Staithes much more the exception than the rule.[122]

Oral evidence lends some (though not unequivocal) support to this impression. The practice of churching, for example, remained popular until the end of the period under study in both traditional working-class neighbourhoods and on the newer council estates, but there is evidence that its old meanings had become less clearly defined amongst some female interviewees who bore children in the post-war years than it had been for their parents' generation. The practice seems to have been continued to some extent as a customary rite of passage expected by the new mother, but also in some cases as a practice demanded by the grandparents' generation and particularly the grandmother. Mrs Hammond, for example, was churched after the births of both of her children in 1953 and 1965. The reason, however, was that, 'My mother wouldn't let me go out of the house with Glynis or Paul'.[123] Mrs Causer, who moved to the Priory Estate as a child and remained living with her mother until marriage, recalled the idea that a new mother was not allowed to go into another house until churched, 'like there was something hanging over you'. Her mother insisted on the ceremony and she tried to encourage her observance by her own children but without success. This failure she attributed to the infrequent contact between her and her children who do not live nearby.[124]

In areas such as the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates, where the mutual reinforcement of kinship and neighbourhood ties characteristic of much of Gornal and parts of the older working-class areas of Dudley had been disrupted, traditional beliefs were not always successfully passed on through the generations. Mrs Carter, born in 1936, and a lifelong

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[122] John Wolffe, 'The Religions of the Silent Majority', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945, Volume I: Traditions* (1993), pp. 304-46 (p. 329).
[123] RPMSI, D16.
[124] RPMSI, D6.

resident on the Wren's Nest Estate, recalled her surprise at finding the door of her mother's house closed to her until she had been churched:

> And when I had our Billy I lived with his [her husband's] mother. And I was there a fortnight before I did come out and then I went to the town and as I said I happened to go to my mother's but she wouldn't let me in the 'ouse. I went round the back and she let me open the door. And her says [...] "When ai yon gonna be churched?" And I says on Sunday. And her says "Until you've been churched and had the baby christened", her says, "I allays think it's bad luck". And I says "Oh, it's alright, I shan't take offence or nothing, like". And I went and was churched and after I'd had our Billy christened [...] and after we came out of church we went right to my mother's.[125]

Asked whether she too had believed that to enter another house before being churched would be to court bad luck, her answer was equivocal and emphasised once more the greater insistence on the practice and profounder conviction of its importance with her parents' generation.

> Well, I felt that way inclined, yes, like. Today, many - they don't have them christened at all. But his parents and my parents always thought you had to be churched first.[126]

If the folk belief in the importance of churching for the avoidance of ill luck had become less prevalent, or held with less conviction, the function of the service as a thanksgiving for a safe delivery seems, for Mrs Carter, to have been replaced by a ritual providing the reassurance of a socially sanctioned procedure helping to effect a return to normal daily routines whatever the outcome of the birth: 'With the first baby, I lost the first baby, but I still went and was churched myself like again'.[127]

Mrs Hood, born in 1921 and a lifelong worshipper at Ruiton Congregational chapel, had her first child in 1945. Both her parents had died during her childhood and she recalled that whilst the custom of churching was popular locally she was not churched after the births of her children, since she had no older relatives to insist upon observance of the practice:

> Yes, women had to be churched. They couldn't go out until they'd been churched. That was a very old custom [...] Well, they were superstitious.[128]

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[125] RPMSI, D4.
[126] RPMSI, D4.
[127] RPMSI, D4.
[128] RPMSI, G15.

Mrs Downing, born in 1921 in Tividale, retained a belief in the appropriateness of an act of thanksgiving for a safe delivery, but claimed to be more sceptical than her parents' generation about the superstitions attaching to the practice:

> We took them to baptism and I went up to the altar for a separate blessing on the same visit. I don't think I'd have thought so strongly that it was bad luck to go to somebody's house. But it was right to go to church to make a thanksgiving.[129]

Mrs Tudor, born in 1918, attended Sunday school at St Thomas's but rarely attended church as an adult. She had three children between 1939 and 1946 and, though she felt giving thanks to God was appropriate, she was similarly sceptical about the possibility that bad luck would attend a new mother who failed to visit church before entering any other building.

> When I came out of hospital I had to go straight to church, or they wouldn't let you in th'ouse. [...] The family [...] They said the first place you had to go was church.

Mrs X[130] Oh yes, you had to go to church. They said it was bad luck to go anywhere until you'd been churched. Pray for your forgiveness.

Q. Would it have worried you if you hadn't been able to get to church?

> No, I don't think so. I mean, when you're brought up like that you say prayers on your own, you can.[131]

It seems to have been sometime in the late 1950s and early 1960s that a local belief in the importance of churching started to decline markedly. By the time Mrs Smart, a Priory Estate resident, had the last four of her eight children between 1960 and 1965, for example, she had 'gone off the idea' of churchings and christenings which were, in any case, she claimed no longer universally 'automatic'.[132] Mrs Latham, a lifelong Methodist in Lower Gornal, was churched when she had her son in 1966 but recalled that by that time the practice had started to go into decline in Gornal.[133]

Changes in attitudes to sex and gender stereotypes may have reinforced the weakening hold of the ritual of churching. Some women were not only unclear about the significance of the ritual but also repelled by what they perceived to be the implications of the restrictions on the

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[129] RPMSI, D8.
[130] A friend present at this part of the interview.
[131] RPMSI, D28.
[132] RPSMI, D25.
[133] RPMSI, G21.

new-born mother. Several of Elizabeth Roberts' interviewees who had children during or after the Second World War and who were churched, recalled with distaste the sensed implication that one was 'dirty', 'unclean' or 'wicked' and needed cleansing. Mrs W5B, for example, born in 1933 was churched because she thought she had to, but did not like it because the gist of it was, she felt, that one was unclean and needed to be purified.[134] Mrs G7P, born 1944 was churched on the occasion of the birth of her first child (1971) but 'was so disgusted with the service I didn't go for the second one' in 1975, since it made her feel that she had done something wrong.[135] Interviewees in Dudley and Gornal did not express a comparably strong distaste for churching, but some felt uncomfortable with its implications. In Dudley, Mrs Griffiths, who was born in 1931 and attended Sunday school at 'Wesley' Methodist chapel but rarely attended anywhere as an adult, had children during the 1950s and 60s. As an adult she moved first to Gornal and then to Woodsetton, no longer enjoying the regular contact with the family network she had experienced as a child. She thought that the service of blessing was 'nice', but felt somewhat confused:

> You couldn't go out into the next door neighbour's house. I've never really fathomed it out. You were classed as unclean or something [...] when you had a baby, although it was alright by the Church having the baby, because you'd done the [hesitates] deed, you had to be blessed by the Vicar to bring you back onto the road again. You'd strayed, that's the way I always thought about it [...] You'd done something like as you'd got to be forgiven or else they'd be punished.[136]

Increasing Material Comfort

Increased prosperity and the increasing opportunities that it provided for leisure activities in the form of the car, the television and the consumption of various other alternative leisure facilities on Sundays as well as weekday evenings, contributed to declining involvement in institutional religion and to a more relaxed attitude to Sunday activities.

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[134] Mrs W5B, b. 1933; see also, for examples, Mrs O1B, b. 1916; Mrs B2B, b. 1931; Mrs S3B, b. 1927; Mrs W5L, b. 1940

[135] Mrs G7P, b. 1944. There is evidence that in the Gornals a woman was also regarded as unclean during her period. Mr Latham, a Lake Street Methodist, recalled, 'They used to kill pigs in the Gornals [...] and they would never let a woman touch a pig until the bacon was cured and was hanging up because they reckoned that if she'd got her period she was poorly and if she touched the pig it would turn it bad. They would never allow a woman to touch a pig when it was being killed and when it was being hung' (RPMSI, G21).

[136] RPMSI, D10.

The activities of the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council (GSFCC) illustrate the changes in attitude in relation to Sunday leisure activities. During the post-war years, the GSFCC, keen defenders of the Sabbath, faced an increasingly difficult task, with a trend towards games and sports being played in public on Sundays. For many years it had felt able to call upon the local authorities - in particular Councillors of the Sedgley Urban District Council and the hierarchy of the local police force - to monitor the Sabbath and stamp out such activities.

By the mid-1950s, however, there was clear evidence that the broader consensus on the desirability of eschewing certain forms of activity on Sundays was fragmenting. Complaints lodged by the GSFCC with the Sedgley council concerning the use of half a dozen children's swings on a field behind Zoar chapel in Lower Gornal, met with far from unanimous sympathy from councillors. Councillor Mrs E. Williams, defended such 'innocent pleasures' and claimed the support of 'many parents', whilst complaining that the demands of the GSFCC were

> an interference with the liberty of parents who wish to send their children out on Sunday afternoons - and I object to being controlled.[137]

By the mid- to late-1960s Sabbath-breaking, as the GSFCC perceived it, was more-or-less resignedly accepted as an irreversible *fait accompli*, with 'public nuisance' by now accepted as the only likely grounds for successful complaints.[138] That the local secular authorities could not be relied upon for support in enforcing the Sabbath was given emphatic confirmation in September 1964 when Sedgley UDC passed a motion that permission be granted to any organisation applying to the Council to play organised games on Sundays on any of the council's pitches. When no reply was received to the GSFCC's letter of protest, it was agreed simply to 'let this matter rest'.[139] Two years later, the Council had apparently accepted the implications of its minority Sabbatarian stance, abandoning any notion of claiming for itself the right to employ the channels of authority to enforce Sunday Observance, but rather accepting

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[137] *DH*, 30 July 1955.
[138] G&SFCC Minutes, .March 1962
[139] G&SFCC Minutes, September and November 1964; letter from the Secretary of G&SFCC to Sedgley UDC, 3 October 1964.

its position as one voice among many in a pluralistic and secular society. During a GSFCC discussion of an LDOS petition against a Private Members' Sunday Entertainments Bill,

> the question was asked whether we had a right to ask anyone to vote our way, because an M.P. had to think of all of his constituents, and not just a section of them. It was generally agreed that we were in no position to dictate to anyone, but equally we had a perfect right, and duty as a Free Church Council, to make our views known.[140]

The decline in the sanctity of the Sabbath was mirrored by a more relaxed attitude to other Christian festivals which had previously been observed with quiet respect. By the interwar years it was already the case that the Easter service was facing secular competition. As the vicar of Dudley observed in 1936:

> Easter is no longer, as it once was, a really reliable indication of the total number of Communicants in a parish, for while we still get more Communicants at this Festival than at any other a great deal depends on the time on which it falls, and the weather which accompanies it. More and more people look forward to this period as the first holiday in the year.[141]

During the post-War years, the local press reflected and reinforced the trend towards regarding important festivities of the church calendar as secular holidays. The regular Nonconformist and Anglican columnists disappeared, and a new columnist, 'Man about Town', commented on the weather and the holiday atmosphere, whilst cinemas and theatres during the early post-War years were, reporters noted, regularly packed during the Easter weekend.[142]

Such changes were reinforced, and increasingly accepted, during the post-War years. On Good Friday in 1959, for example, the people of Dudley could choose to enjoy, amongst other things, cinema, a rock and roll event or roller skating. Local clergy were as concerned to appear consistent and enlightened as they were to defend the sanctity of the day. The Reverend

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[140] G&SFCC Minutes, November 1966. It is noticeable that councillors were again concerned to avoid giving the impression of whining about competition to Sunday services, suggesting that they suspected that this was the view of church-goers which could easily be taken by those outside the churches. The emphasis on a rest day as a right could be acceptable to non-church-goers as an aspect of employment law, shorn of its Sabbatarian connotations. It was urged that the letters should be composed, 'taking care to project a positive line, pointing out that a day of rest was everyone's right, but that this Bill might deprive many of that right under cover of sweeping away anomalies'. Replies received from George Wigg and Robert Edwards in 1966 were predictably polite but non-commital (G&SFCC Correspondence between Secretary and Others, 1950 - 1970).

[141] *St Thomas Parish Magazine*, May 1936. That Easter had become, for many, a 'secular holiday' was also bemoaned by the curate at St Christopher's in 1942 (*St Francis and St Christopher Parish Magazine*, April 1942).

[142] e.g. *DH*, 31 March 1951.

Tom Keith Murray, Vicar of St Thomas's for example, suggested that it would be unfair to deny the cinema-goer what others could enjoy on their own televisions.[143]

By the end of the period, the television in particular was beginning to present the churches with rival claims on people's loyalties, although the radio had presented such counter-attractions during earlier years,[144] and the availability of Sunday services on the radio enabled some, who preferred to do so, to partake in a religious service without leaving the comfort of their own homes. Watching television on a Sunday evening was for some also a rare and cherished time for the family to spend together. Mrs Hewitt, a Dudley publican's daughter, born in 1960, recalled being torn between the wish to watch a favourite television programme in the company of the rest of the family and attending afternoon Sunday school at St Thomas's.[145] Mr Hughes of Kent Street Upper Gornal dated the demise of Sunday evening post-chapel gatherings at his parents' house to the arrival of Sunday television.[146] Moreover, high attendances at special services had been generated, at least partly, by the attraction of the opportunity to hear a famous visiting preacher, who could deliver a stirring sermon or address providing, in the process, both spiritual food and a form of dramatic entertainment. In the age of radio and particularly television the attractions of such speakers were diminished by the availability of entertainment and famous persons in one's own home. In 1967, Reverend Welch, minister at Ruiton Congregational Church, responded to three suggestions for appropriate visiting preachers for the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council Spring rally by observing that 'top names did not necessarily have the drawing power they once did.' He added, 'A good local man will draw at least as many'.[147]

The motor car and the opportunities which it presented for week-end leisure, however, probably did more than either radio or television to alter Sunday habits during our period. By the end of the Second World War, there was widespread concern about the Sunday leisure opportunities offered by the motor car and their possible effects on church attendance. Early

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[143] *DH*, 27 March 1959.
[144] e.g. RPMSI, G5.
[145] RPMSI, D15.
[146] RPMSI, G18.
[147] G&SFCC Minutes, September 1967. John Munsey Turner comments briefly on this matter in his book *Modern Methodism 1932-1998* (Peterborough, 1998), p. 54.

complaints were made during the inter-war years in Dudley. A correspondent for the local press argued that the motor-car was bringing on the non-observance of the Sabbath, suggesting that the charabanc, the car and the motorbike all constituted a greater attraction than church, adding that charabanc parties were 'greatly on the increase', returning noisily in the evenings.[148] The Dudley Odeon cinema was the second in the country (after Shirley in south Birmingham) to have an Odeon Car Club, founded in 1938. Two hundred attended the first annual dinner in December 1938 when the club's organisers stated, 'All we want to do is something for patrons of our theatres in their leisure time on Sundays'.[149] In 1946, complaints were voiced at the Methodist Conference that parents were offering their children too many alternative activities on Sundays, most notably taking them into the countryside by car. This activity, it was claimed, was 'one of the major causes of weakness in Sunday School work and of deficiency in Christian knowledge'.[150]

As the period drew towards a close, the car was amongst the major counter-attractions to attendance at a place of worship on a Sunday, as it became more affordable to the working class. Whilst it is difficult to provide evidence of any precise correlation between increasing car ownership and decreasing involvement in associational religion, the former trend in the post-war years was undoubtedly a major factor in encouraging an increasingly widespread enjoyment of Sunday as a day for leisure activities. Dudley, like the rest of the country, witnessed a sharp growth in car ownership in the relatively prosperous 1950s. By 1962, one in three Dudley families had a car, a growth of 85% since 1955.[151] By the 1960s, many local churches faced not only dwindling adult congregations but also rapidly falling Sunday school numbers. St Thomas's, the parish church for Dudley, for example, could muster only 70 scholars by 1964, compared with the several hundred always on roll before the war.[152] In May

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[148] *DH*, 25 July 1925.
[149] *DH*, 21 January 1939.
[150] *Minutes of Methodist Conference*, 1946, p.221.
[151] Information provided by the Borough Engineer to a local MoT enquiry, quoted in *DH*, 21 July 1962. There is no indication of the distribution of car ownership by class. Whilst one may assume that the middle-class was significantly over-represented, the figure of one in three families suggests that by 1962 car ownership must have penetrated at least some sections of the working class, who still comprised 75% of the town's population.
[152] *St Thomas, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, October 1965.

1960, Reverend Tom Keith Murray, incumbent of St Thomas's, refused to close the Sunday school but admitted:

> We must face the fact that in these days when more and more people have the family car, attendance at afternoon Sunday School is going to decline.[153]

Charles Elliott, vicar of St James's Lower Gornal, was similarly concerned about the effects of the car on Sunday school attendance, assuring readers of the parish magazine that he was aware that people 'have cars and like to get out on Sundays' and that he was therefore seeking to provide a mid-week service for children.[154]

Mr Hughes, a lifelong Methodist at Kent Street Upper Gornal, recalled a rapid decline in the numbers attending Sunday school at Kent Street during the 1960s, partly attributable, he suggested, to demographic changes, but more to the increase in local car ownership and the use of Sunday as a family leisure day:

> After about '62 to '64 many families became mobile, had cars [...for]many in this area, there was still a lot of work on Saturdays, particularly for men, Saturday mornings in particular, they would do overtime [...] That left you with one day to go out in the car.[155]

The motor car not only provided greater mobility but was also a symbol of success, as the vicar of St Luke's, Dudley, acknowledged in 1964:

> Owning a car gives a man a sense of status, and above all, of power. Life is so dull, or even worse, for so many people.[156]

Mr Lewis, brought up on the Wren's Nest Estate, explicitly linked the increased mobility provided by the car and the emotional investment in the car as a source of pride with declining working-class interest in the churches:

> Over the years it started to decline and I couldn't understand why. The only reason I could think of was that the motor-car came onto the scene. In my days, you couldn't go very far unless you went by bus [...] or if lucky then on train. The coming of the motor car - the car became something that destroyed all the communities. People began to love the car better than anything because they was so wrapped up with the car [...] Of course, they was on the up and up then. To have a car - oh my word! [...] you'd get a crowd looking around it [...] So it

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153 *St Thomas, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, May 1960.

154 *St James Lower Gornal Parish Magazine*, May 1963.

155 RPMSI, G20 .

156 *St Luke's, Dudley, Parish Magazine*, July 1964. See, for example, the comments of Mr and Mrs Tomlins on their cars, which they owned from the early 1950s (RPMSI, G29).

> was something which the working class tried for over the years and never thought would become a reality but it did.[157]

The Sunday family outing in the car, including children who, in earlier years would probably have been sent to Sunday school, had become a favourite regular activity of several interviewees by the late 1950s and early 1960s.[158] The wish for an outing was, in Mr Tomlins's words, 'a mutual feeling between the family'.[159] The Sabbath was increasingly regarded as a day for enjoying family activities, a rare opportunity for the family to come together. For some, it was the only day in the week when the household could relax together, either at home or on a trip out. For others - particularly those who had been removed from the older communities of Dudley, tightly bound by kinship ties, to the new council estates - it was the only chance for family members, dispersed across the town, to come together.[160]

Moreover, annual church and chapel outings to the countryside or seaside, which, in the early years of the century, were anticipated with great excitement particularly by Sunday scholars, were by the 1960s attracting far smaller numbers. This was not simply the product of smaller Sunday School classes: of those children who were attending Sunday School it seems that only a small percentage, in comparison with early years, were signing up for outings. In the late 1960s the Mount Zion correspondent of *The Messenger* observed of the Sunday School anniversary singers' trip, in earlier years a great event eagerly anticipated, that 'again as in recent previous years, the outing was not as well supported as it could have been'.[161] The growing proportion of the population owning their own motor car and thus able to enjoy regular independent outings meant that the excursions arranged by the church no longer provided popular red-letter day excitement as they once did. Mr Gould recalled that the Sunday school outing from St Francis's no longer took place from about 1965, noting that trips to Clent, Kinver and the Lickey Hills had 'ceased giving such pleasure' since cars had become popular.[162] Nor, in the context of increasing affluence from the mid-1950s, did the various other

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[157] RPMSI, D21.
[158] e.g. RPMSI, G2, G6, G29, D8, D10. See also the evidence of Elizabeth Roberts's interviewees, e.g. LOHA, Mrs J1B.
[159] RPMSI, G29.
[160] e.g. RPMSI, D10.
[161] *The Messenger*, July 1968.
[162] RPMSI, D13.

treats organised by the Sunday schools, hold such a great attraction as they once had. As Mr Hughes recalled:

> The reason why so many kids came to Sunday school [...] was because there were a number of set pieces which were in a way, the most important and thrilling things in your life. It shows what dull lives we lived! There was the Christmas party [...] That was worth looking forward to. Numbers always picked up towards the Christmas party and yet they dropped off in between. And then there was Prize Day [...] I mean you got books, the only books that some kids had were their Sunday school prizes. And then another one was the Sunday school Anniversary, because you got new clothes [...] and this was a great thing really. And you had a present for going on Sunday school Anniversary, a box of chocolates. And many kids, the only time they had a Dairy box of chocolates was when they went on the platform.[163]

Material progress may also have contributed more directly to the erosion of popular religious beliefs. As David Hempton has argued, drawing on Obelkevich's study of South Lindsey and the observations of George Eliot in *Silas Marner*, 'popular religion was overwhelmingly pessimistic - designed more to fob off misfortune than to appropriate the remote abstractions of salvation'.[164] Similarly, Abercrombie *et al.* have argued that superstitions and religious beliefs in the second half of the twentieth century serve to explain what otherwise remains inexplicable, including apparently arbitrary misfortune, and noted that women and the working class, being more subject to circumstances outside their own control, were more superstitious.[165] Increased prosperity, together with the National Health service would, if this is the case, tend to undermine popular religion and superstition, by reducing the likelihood that members of the working class would be confronted by two devastating eventualities outside their own control: the threat of destitution and the threat of premature death from ill health.

As early as 1916, during the relative local prosperity of the First World War, a reporter for the *Dudley Herald* noted the disappearance of a number of traditional mining superstitions and concluded, with a touch of irony, 'If any superstitions are left, wages at 9s. a day - the highest figure on record - will most likely remove them'.[166] The judgement was, however, as has been shown, premature. Superstitions and folk religious beliefs retained a

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[163] RPMSI, G20.

[164] David Hempton, '"Popular Religion" 1800-1986', in Terence Thomas (ed.), *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices 1800-1986* (1988), pp. 181-210 (pp. 185-6).

[165] Nicholas Abercrombie, John Baker, Sebastian Brett and Jane Foster, 'Superstition and Religion: the God of the Gaps', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 3 (1970), pp. 93-129.

[166] *DH*, 19 August, 1916.

strong hold over the popular imagination, particularly during the inter-war years, long periods of which were characterised locally by considerable hardship, as chapter 2 has shown, and when many of the interviewee sample were growing up. Their parents' generation, they recalled, were strongly inclined towards superstitious beliefs and practices. Many, as has been shown, contrasted their own moderate superstitious inclinations with their parents' greater fervour. Many of the beliefs and practices described by interviewees referred to the threat of ill-health or death, and to means of securing financial gains. Mrs Griffiths, who was amongst the more superstitious interviewees, nevertheless emphasised the extent to which superstitious beliefs had permeated life during her childhood before and during the Second World War:

> I think myself that there was that much hardship and that much grief that they was frightened to do anything to bring the bad gods into the house, sort of thing [...] If you did anything like that I think they thought they was bringing them into the house or to the family so they sort of did these superstitions and sort of lived by them, it was halving it [the likelihood of trouble] you know.[167]

Some of the superstitions described in chapter 4 were inextricably linked to domestic routines which were being rendered defunct by the availability of consumer goods. Mrs Griffiths, for example, continued her grandmother's practice of not throwing out washing water on Good Friday, believing that to do so would bring bad luck, until she had her first washing machine: 'how can you stop automatic machines from going down the drain, you know?' Others superstitions involving coal and soot on fire-grate were also forgotten with the advent of the gas fire, as several interviewees commented.[168]

Material inducements could also, it seems, weaken the hold of traditional folk beliefs. In April 1949, a local correspondent noted the unusually small number of Easter weddings at local churches - Easter together with Christmas and Whit traditionally having been considered times likely to augur success in 'the matrimonial lottery' - and attributed the fall to the availability of an income tax rebate to those marrying before the end of the financial year, concluding that this showed 'how tradition can be affected by the intricacies of higher finance'.[169] In March 1962 the local Registrar noted that a hundred couples had booked

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[167] RPMSI, D10.
[168] E.g. RPMSI, G15 (Mr Hood).
[169] *DH*, 23 April 1949; also *DH*, 30 April 1927.

weddings at Dudley Registry Office for the following four weeks in order to 'beat the tax'.[170] Local church marriage registers for the post-war years confirm that multiple weddings were crammed into the few weeks before April, altering the inter-war pattern of multiple marriages being celebrated at major Christian festivals, particularly Easter and Christmas.[171]

Clergymen were more concerned with the effects on more orthodox Christian beliefs and values. During the post-war years denominational[172] and local church and chapel publications were liberally scattered with articles condemning the effects of the desire for material goods on moral standards and religious belief and practice. In December 1956, Reverend Arthur Dawson Catterall of St Francis's on the Priory Estate asked whether leisure, the television and the car were enough for happiness and contrasted the increasing consumption of consumer durables such as the television, washing machine and car with the poor church buildings on the Priory and Wren's Nest Estates.[173] In January 1958, Father Bebb of St Edmund's, Dudley, urged readers to take control of their lives and not to allow 'pleasure, worldly comfort or material prosperity' to rule their lives, since the latter do not answer in sickness and pain. He added that 'lapsed Christians' fall to the attractions of pleasure, neglecting their church duties and 'eventually they cease to practice [sic] their religion at all [...] they just drift away'.[174] Moreover, images of heaven as the place of plenty, the relief from suffering, pain and hardship, had lesser powers of persuasion in the context of the greatly increased material comforts of the post-war period.

Materialism was, of course, inextricably (though not inevitably) linked with the increasing valuation of the family, as consumer goods provided family entertainment, reduced

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[170] *DH*, 3 March 1962.

[171] e.g. 18% of marriages at the parish church of St Thomas between 1945 and 1965 took place in March, as against 7% between 1913 and 1944 (St Thomas Marriage Registers, 1913-54 and 1954-65). At neighbouring St Edmund's church, March marriages rose from under 4% of marriages between 1933 and 1939 to nearly 15% between 1945 and 1965 (St Edmund Marriage Registers, 1933-65).

[172] e.g. *The Worcester Diocesan Messenger*, July 1947.

[173] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, December 1956.

[174] *Parish Magazine of St Edmund, Dudley*, January 1958. Ten months later, Bebb made a similar point, arguing that although many were materially more comfortable, there was widespread spiritual neglect and a greater prevalence of 'neurotic anxiety', due to an awareness of the insecurity of prosperity. By a nice irony, but also indicating that those involved in church and its organisations were far from aspiring to aesceticism, the same issue of the parish magazine reported a visit by the M.U. to the Ideal Home Exhibition in Birmingham with special interest expressed in kitchen labour-saving devices (*Parish Magazine of St Edmund, Dudley*, October 1958).

the onerousness of household chores and enabled the family to go out on excursions together. As a writer in the Gornal and Sedgley Free Church magazine complained of residents on the new estates being built in the area in the 1960s:

> Many of the newly-married human couples on the estates [are] concerned first and fore-most with *their* pay-packets, *their* housing comforts, *their* interior decorations, *their* possessions, their bodily desires and feelings, their entertainment and pleasure, their standing in the eyes of their workmates and neighbours.[175]

The focus, the writer complained, was the family cell, with little care for the needs of neighbours or of the villages, a departure from the values to which the villages were accustomed. Indeed these post-war social changes tended to undermine the conditions which had provided a context for the expression of one of the major constituents of popular religiosity: practical Christianity. The popular religious emphasis on practical Christianity and helping others in difficulty, doomed itself to post-war decline. A context of increasing affluence and a vastly improved welfare net not only further devalued the already relatively meagre charity which could be provided by the churches but also undermined one of the very central tenets of popular religion. The disintegration of old communities - for reasons which have been outlined in chapter 2 - and the trend towards the privacy of the household unit with fewer social ties to its neighbourhood, the *Gesellschaft* of modern society, increasingly confined the exercise of standards and responsibilities deriving from Christian belief to the home, turning popular into family religion.

On the other hand, increased prosperity also enhanced the independence of youth. The contrast of inter-war experiences of life with the life of local, as well as national, youth by the 1960s is clear. Enjoying financial independence and the freedom to enjoy it how they wished, local youth found their own satisfactions through local leisure facilities, or expressed displeasure at their inadequacy, as the local press makes clear.[176] According to Reverend Hugh Butt, pastor of Priory Road Baptist Church, addressing the West Midland Baptist Association in 1962, youth culture had effectively sealed off teenagers from the influence of the church, creating an environment utterly alien to the culture of associational religion. Butt claimed to

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[175] *The Messenger*, September 1964.
[176] *DH*, 28 July 1962.

have watched teenagers in coffee bars and jazz sessions rocking and rolling and commented, somewhat poetically:

> Alone in this colourful, provocative, alien world of the non-church-goer I knew I was a stranger, an outcast from another world, a square, and I knew that [*sic*] as I looked, just how wide was the gulf separating these youngsters and thousands like them from the Church.[177]

Butt's address was one of a dwindling number of 'religious' events or issues reported in the local press by the 1960s. Before World War II, the main local paper, *The Dudley Herald*, reflected and reinforced the sense that Christianity was part of the fabric of local cultural and social, as well as spiritual life. The paper had carried regular reports of church and chapel events, had regular religious columnists, provided local ministers with the opportunity to write articles and frequently published letters on religious matters. But the content fell from over 5% of print in 1914 to under 1% by 1965. From 1945 onwards light entertainment, leisure and commercial advertisements took up an increasing share of the paper.[178]

Science, rationalism and pluralism

The opposition of science and religion, particularly in the wake of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, was a well-known concern of the Victorians, though the degree of penetration of scientific ideas throughout society remains difficult to determine.[179] Jeffrey Cox argued that 'the spread of scientific ideas' was among the causes of the purging of 'diffusive Christianity of centuries of old non-Christian accretions'.[180] Sociologists of secularisation, and historians who have adopted their models, have also pointed to the increasing social and cultural authority of scientific ideas

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[177] *DH*, 26 May 1962.

[178] The figures are based on a small content analysis exercise in which column space on religious matters was calculated as a percentage of the total newspaper column space for the first issue of each month (avoiding Easter reports) for 1914 (5.2%), 1925 (4%), 1935 (4.5%), 1945 (2.4%), 1955 (0.5%) and 1965 (0.9%).

[179] See, for example, Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975), chapter 7; *idem*, *The Victorian Church, Part II*, 2nd edition (1972), chapter 1; John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1991), chapter 7 and 8; A. Symondson, *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (1970); Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 4-5, 23-25 and 214-15; B.G. Worrall, *The Making of the Modern Church: Christianity in England since 1800*, revised edn. (1993), pp. 64-6, 95-6, 116-18, 120, 155-58 and 251.

[180] J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford, 1982), p. 95.

as one of the forces undermining religious belief and the authority of its representatives.[181] Others, however, have challenged such assumptions, either by arguing that scientific rationalism has simply failed to gain such popular hegemony, or by arguing that the decline in churchgoing was not a symptom of the replacement of religious belief with scientific assumptions.[182]

Throughout the period, science was credited by local clergy and religious commentators with producing popular scepticism.[183] In August 1919, for example, G.A. Ashton, President of the Dudley W.E.A. gave a Sunday afternoon paper on religion and science, claiming that the 'average man' reading science books allowed naturalism and materialism to drive out 'spirit' whilst evolution, badly understood, was driving out religion.[184] In 1935 Dr A.P. Shepherd, Vicar of Dudley (at St Thomas's) from 1932, published a series of articles in the *Dudley Herald*, entitled 'Belief in God: Causes for Widespread Lack of Conviction'. Amongst the problems he identified were the obsession with scientific and astronomical discoveries and a sense that man was too insignificant to be of concern to any creator, resulting in a self-centred materialism.[185] The same arguments were put in the post-war years, but with greater frequency and with a greater sense of urgency. At the 1947 Methodist Conference the President, William E. Farndale, claimed a belief in science was taking the place of a belief in Providence in an increasingly secularist society.[186] The modernist wings of the churches were not, however, entirely innocent of promoting a scientific rationalism

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[181] See, for example, Roland Robertson, *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 22-25 and 218-223; Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Harmondsworth, 1966), pp. 64-68, 70; Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels* (Harmondsworth, 1971); Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago, 1965), p. 261ff; A.D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (1980), pp. 57-9. The arguments are briefly reviewed in Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion* (1995), pp. 173-5.

[182] The most prominent sociologist arguing against the rationalist-scientific hegemony argument is David Martin. See, for example, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization* (1969), pp. 18-19; *A Sociology of English Religion* (1967), pp. 112-16. See also Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (1993), pp. 13-16.

[183] Local clergymen were not all averse to the findings of science, and some re-fashioned their theology in its light: Reverend A.E. Fox preached at the rather intellectual Congregational chapel at King Street in 1929 on evolution which, he felt, showed God working towards greater perfection, going from strength to strength, preferring such an account to the idea of the 'Fall' which implied that God had suffered a defeat (*DH*, 2 February 1929).

[184] *DH*, 16 August 1919.

[185] *DH*, 12 October 1935.

[186] *Methodist Minutes of Conference* (1947), pp. 175-77.

at the expense of supernaturalism. In 1947, Bishop E.W. Barnes of Birmingham published his notorious book *The Rise of Christianity*, in which he eliminated the miraculous, casting doubt on central tenets of Christology, and accommodating scientific assumptions.[187] His arguments were popularised through the press, provoking debate on a scale unequalled until John Robinson published *Honest to God* in 1963. The Barnes controversy generated responses from local clergy in parish magazines. Father Ferley of St Edmund's, Dudley, for example inveighed against the Bishop in the parish magazine in November 1947.[188]

In 1960, the Bishop of Worcester argued that though most people had never studied science, the 'average man'

> thinks that Science has in some way discredited the truths of Religion, so that while he may support the Church as an institution which does quite a lot of valuable social work, he is unable to involve himself in its worship.[189]

He was probably over-stating the case. The year before, a Gallup poll had asked whether interviewees considered that science was, in the long run, in opposition to religion. An unusually large number (39%) were uncertain, 36% believed conflict was not inevitable, and 26% felt that science and religion were fundamentally opposed.[190] Indeed, the evidence adduced earlier in the thesis about the popularity of arguments from design amongst both regular and irregular churchgoers suggests that evolutionist ideas still have not wholly replaced a simple creationism amongst many people.

There is, however, evidence that scientific assumptions did underpin the rejection of the metaphysical claims of religion for some, and that access to educational opportunities and to the media could encourage scepticism. Chapter 3 has shown how radio and television broadcasts provided a form of surrogate religious service for many. But there was another side to the coin and the policy and effects of the BBC in the post-war years were less clearly

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[187] Paul Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 53-56 provides a damning view of Barnes and his book, as does Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century 1900-1965* (1965), p. 481. For the Evangelical response to the book, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989), pp. 207-8. Barnes had made earlier comments about the challenge of science to religion which were reported in the local press (*DH*, 19 November 1927).

[188] *Parish Magazine of St Edmund's, Dudley*, November 1947.

[189] *Worcester Messenger*, October 1960.

[190] George H. Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975, Volume 1, 1937-1964* (New York, 1976), p. 459.

supportive of Christianity. Whilst before the Second World War, Reith's BBC had been dogmatically morally and religiously conservative, from 1947 attacks on Christianity were permitted.[191] Most famously and most controversially, in 1955 Mrs Margaret Knight, a psychology lecturer, gave a series of talks on humanist bases for morality and attacked conventional religious beliefs. Although Knight's broadcast proved to be the catalyst for the formation of the British Humanist Society, an opinion poll in Manchester showed that a huge majority (91%) opposed her opinions.[192] Nevertheless, a pattern of conflict between religious and secular values expressed in the broadcasting media continued into the 1960s.

During the post-war years, local clergy clearly felt that the media could no longer be looked to as bastions of support for the Christian cause. In 1953, Father John Bebb, of St Edmund's Dudley recounted in the parish magazine how he had recently been told by a local man that religion was a myth and untrue, that it was disproved by science, as argued by Professor Joad (who was a member of the panel on the popular radio programme, 'The Brains Trust'), and that Darwin had shown that God did not create the Universe.[193] In 1963, a local Methodist minister addressed a meeting in Dudley and berated contemporary society for its tendency to turn to the television as an oracle.[194] Nor, it seems, did the schools provide the support for the local churches which they had provided between the wars. Older interviewees recalled day school teachers, at board schools as well as church schools, many of whom had attended local churches and chapels, encouraging children to attend Sunday school.[195] Moreover, texts were learned by rote, tedious no doubt, but providing a repertoire of familiar

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[191] For the effects of the radio on British culture between the wars, see Taylor, *English History*, pp. 298-99; for an extended discussion of the changing post-War balance between Christian and secular or non-Christian views represented on BBC radio and television, see Kenneth Wolffe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation 1922-1956* (1984), pp. 315-537.

[192] Colin Campbell, 'Humanism in Britain: the Formation of a Secular Value-oriented Movement', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 2 (1969) edited by David Martin, pp.157-72 (p. 167); Welsby, *History of the Church of England*, p. 52; Wolfe, *Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, pp. 445-54.

[193] *Parish Magazine of St Edmund's, Dudley*, September 1953. For C.E.M. Joad's involvement in radio broadcasting, see Wolfe, *Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation*, pp. 199, 206 and 210.

[194] *DH*, 2 November 1963.

[195] e.g. RPMSI, G7. Mrs Childs, in her autobiography, recalls her headmistress, talking about the drowning in a local quarry of a little boy on a Sunday afternoon, emphasising that 'he should have been in Sunday School'.

extracts from the Bible which could often be wholly or partially recalled later in life.[196] On the other hand, younger interviewees educated after the War often recalled teachers who were neither local residents nor attenders at local churches, and religious education lessons which were very varied in terms of content and the enthusiasm of the teacher, but were frequently the minimum required under the Agreed Syllabus, generating little enthusiasm or Bible knowledge among pupils.[197]

Oral evidence confirms that a certain degree of scepticism and relativism were encouraged by formal educational experiences and by contact with the media, though the influence of the latter is so general that it is frequently difficult to ascertain precisely when and how beliefs and values were affected. The confrontation between supernaturalism and science was felt not only by those who rejected Christianity but also by some of the more educated of those who remained firmly within the churches. Mrs Beale, for example, a lifelong attender at Himley Road Methodist chapel, was born in 1920 and took a scholarship to Brierley Hill Grammar School. By her late teens and early twenties she was, she claimed, finding it difficult to accept some of the Biblical miracles, particularly in the Old Testament, and was demanding explanations from teachers within the chapel, which they could not provide.[198] Such incredulity towards miracles, extended to the New Testament, as in the case of Mr Bailey of Ruiton, contributed to total agnosticism.[199]

Superstitions in general were often admitted to with some degree of embarrassed laughter, and the assertion that the parental generation was far more superstitious than their own. It is possible, of course, that each generation tends to regard itself as less superstitious than its parents' generation, and Mass-Observation interviewees in the 1940s often claimed to observe certain superstitious customs more out of family traditions and a wish not to offend family members than from belief.[200] However, without the strong parental authority to secure the transmission of popular religious beliefs or the traditional working-class communities which had sustained them, attitudes to popular superstitions were increasingly characterised by a form

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[196] e.g. RPMSI, G2, G7, G22, G23, D22.
[197] e.g. RPMSI, G10, G13 and G18.
[198] RPMSI, G5.
[199] RPMSI, G1.
[200] e.g. M-O A, FR2461A, 'Superstition', February 1947.

of empiricism, and assumptions about the truth or otherwise of such beliefs were informed by what might be described as a quasi-scientific method. Comparing the superstitious mind-set of their parents with their own scepticism, several interviewees explained their rejection of such beliefs with the simple observation that the expected outcome never materialised, although their parents had always maintained that they did. Miss Haywood, for example, a lifelong regular Methodist, born in Dudley in 1922, who attended school to the age of 16, and in the late 1960s worked abroad for the Methodist church, contrasted the superstitions of her mother, who left school at 14 and never left Dudley, with her own lack of superstition:

> Difficult to know why. Because em, most often things didn't happen through it. Breaking a mirror, bad luck for instance. Well I've broken lots of mirrors and haven't had any bad luck. Things like that, the things didn't materialise that should have done. That's why I came not to believe in them.[201]

Similar objections were occasionally raised as rationalisations for rejecting a belief in prayer and, by extension, in a caring and knowable God. Amongst 101 responses to a 1948 Mass-Observation appeal for written explanations of why people did not attend church were replies which explained disbelief in terms of the absence of any answer to prayer for relief from poverty.[202] Similarly Mrs Smart of the Priory Estate claimed that her loss of belief in God was founded upon the absence of proof:

> I've never had no proof. And I think I should have.
>
> Q. What do you think would have convinced you?
> Well, I've prayed for a good many things in my life, but they haven't come about.
>
> Q. What sorts of things?
> [Laughs] No, I won't tell you that![203]

Others were sceptical about, or explicitly rejected, a belief in life after death, on the grounds that nobody, even departed loved ones, had ever returned to testify to its existence. Mrs Palmer, for example, although a practising Anglican in Dudley, said that she remained unsure about the existence of heaven since her mother, who would have returned to tell her about the after-life

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[201] RPMSI, D17.
[202] M-O A, FR 2556, 'Why I don't go to church', January 1948, p. 6.
[203] RPMSI, D25. Cf. LOHA, Mr W7P.

had she been able to, had never done so, whilst Mrs Causer, a practising Anglican at various points in her life was uncertain about the possibility of an afterlife for similar reasons.[204]

The trend towards an expectation of proof may well have been under way by the early 1940s, judging by Mass-Observation reports. In 1943, for example, a report on religious beliefs concluded that the disinclination to believe in life after death was not due to a lack of concern for such matters but because

> People are looking for proof, since they have learnt to expect proof of any proposition before they can accept it.[205]

Only a small minority of interviewees, three men, claimed to have been agnostic or atheist since their youth or young adulthood.[206] All born between the wars, two of them rationalised their disbelief by reference to science, or scepticism about aspects of the supernatural. Moreover two referred to their contact with such ideas through education and the media. Mr Davis, brought up in a Lower Gornal Strict Baptist family, claimed that his questioning of the metaphysical claims of Christianity began when, at Dudley Grammar School, he developed a bent for science and mathematics (he later became an electrical engineer and then a science teacher):

> of course, in my younger days I was one who - 'Well, you can't prove this' - and I should think 'how are they going to teach me that they're right?', you see, but they couldn't [...] I couldn't see the relevance of it.[207]

For Mr Tomlins such considerations were a product of maturer reflection, seemingly prompted by familiarisation with the claims of secular science through the media of radio and television, and probably did not much trouble him before the end of our period by which time he was still only in his mid-thirties, though the increased frequency of such programmes in the post-war years suggest similar experiences are unlikely to be confined to the last thirty years:

> I don't know whether there is one [god] now. Because I listen to men that are supposed to be more educated than what I am and you listen to the science programmes and the things how the world was created. And to start off these blokes, we know three parts of them are nuts, but most of the stuff they do say is right, so you don't know who to believe.

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[204] RPMSI, D22; RPMSI, D6.
[205] M-O FR1612, 'Faith and Fear in Postwar Britain', 15 February 1943, p. 15.
[206] RPMSI, G1, G9 and G29.
[207] RPMSI, G9.

Q. When did you first encounter these scientific ideas about the world without God?

I can't remember that far back. As a young man I wouldn't have bothered thinking about it.[208]

Previous chapters have referred to the pervasiveness of the popular belief that the complexity and beauty of nature and life pointed to God's design. The authority of evolutionary theories, in many cases encountered in contexts long forgotten by interviewees, could undermine one of the pillars of credibility of Christianity. Mr Hammond, a Dudley man born in 1927, who has rarely attended church as an adult, admitted praying but commented:

> Well, evolution on this planet, we're only a speck aren't we? That's the point. So that I don't think that you can say that there's a God that has created 2 birds. And what came first the bird or the egg? Evolution on this earth is a natural evolution. Not something that was created by God or anybody. I think that you started from a lump of jelly in the sea and then split up into different cells and then come out of the water onto the land.[209]

As significant as popular scientism was a popular relativism in relation to religious faiths. Some local clergymen, of a more liberal disposition, were openly adopting a relativist position by the end of the period. For example, Reverend Arthur Dawson Catterall, minister at St Francis's church on the Priory Estate, wrote in the parish magazine in December 1961 that he believed that anybody truly seeking God, whatever his [*sic*] faith, could not ultimately be denied God's grace and presence.[210] The liberal notion that all faiths, in different ways, lead to God was not always easily accommodated by those whose religious faith was founded upon a supernaturalist realism, without changing the nature of that faith. Confrontation with other faiths both through media coverage and, from the 1950s, through direct contact as a result of immigration, undermined some of old religious certainties. Mr Young of the Wren's Nest Estate, who has never regularly attended church as an adult, referred several times to Muslims, noting that he knew about their faith both through the presence of Muslims in the town and through media coverage. He explained his uncertainty about the Christian notion of heaven:

> Well you've only got to listen to different religions, different people [...] they've all got different beliefs the same as everybody else. But why should there be different beliefs and

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[208] RPMSI, G29.
[209] RPMSI, D16.
[210] *Parish Magazine of St Francis and St Christopher*, December 1961.

> different things if there's just the one God? They've all got different beliefs, like Muslims. All over the world they pray to another person when there's supposed to be just one God.[211]

Mrs Downing, who still attends St James's church, Eve Hill, admitted

> I'm finding it hard to understand Muslims and Sikhs having their temples here, after being told there is one God. That puts questions in my mind. They seem genuine but we have been taught that there is one God.[212]

Miss Haywood, a lifelong Methodist at 'Wesley' chapel in Dudley, recalled childhood songs about 'the mission field and converting the heathen' and, as a child, firmly believed in them. As a young adult in the 1950s, however, she helped a friend who worked at a Birmingham hostel for international students, and encountered many people of different faiths, sowing the seeds of a now firm belief in the possibility that different faiths provide various paths to God.[213] Thus if scientific assumptions could undermine the metaphysical plausibility of Christianity for a few, the evidence that it was possible to be sincere and practising believers in another faith rendered the exclusive claims of Christianity questionable.

It has been argued that popular religious beliefs were in some ways sustained by the continued existence of areas of experience outside human control or beyond human explanation - birth, death, the purpose of life - and weakened as life was made increasingly predictable as material and scientific progress extended man's control over his environment. Paradoxically, however, the impact of unpredictable suffering could also undermine religious belief for some, though usually temporarily. When death was premature and seemed particularly unjust it seemed to fit ill with the popular image of God as a loving and paternal figure.

The failure of loved ones to achieve recovery against the odds, and the apparently capricious and unjust nature of relentless illness, were given as grounds for disbelief in the possibility of miracles. Mrs Hill, born in 1925, suffered the death of a young child and of her husband at a relatively young age. She described the many acts of unlooked for kindness by relatives and neighbours during the War as 'miracles', but asked whether, twenty years later she would still have claimed to believe in miracles, she replied:

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[211] RPMSI, D30.
[212] RPMSI, D8. Cf. RPMSI, G29 (Mr Tomlins).
[213] RPMSI, D17.

> I'd probably have said no, because my son had just died, and my husband's illness had just started and he wasn't a religious man but he never did anybody any harm, but he suffered terrible.[214]

Mrs Sankey, born in 1922, and her sister-in-law Mrs Brooks born in 1905, both occasional attenders at Zoar Methodist chapel in Gornal Wood, pointed to similar incidents in their lives as times when their religious beliefs were shaken, though they were both later reconciled to their losses by the belief that 'there is a reason somehow':

Mrs S Oh we had a tragedy. We had a tragedy and I felt like that. Because we had a son that was killed at 17. And we were very bitter, very bitter because it hurt us very much. He was our eldest son. And I did think at that time, 'Why is there a Lord above that has let this happen?' Especially when I used to go to town and see naughty people about and think that my son had never been naughty, never said a bad word, he was a good lad. And to think they could carry on with their lives, but mine was taken. Why? You do ask yourself

Mrs B It's things like that that do shake your faith. I lost my husband when I was 40 and I was left with 4 children [...] He was at work on the Friday, they brought him home on the Friday and he went to bed and was dead on the Monday morning. And his family, his own sister said 'Why didn't you take my husband who was absolutely helpless [rather than] a man who was working and had got a family to bring up?'

For those who were regular church or chapel-goers such events tended to result in a distancing from religious practice without a total rejection of belief in God. Mrs Jeavons, for example, recounted how she and her mother responded to the early deaths of their husband/father and of a brother/uncle with a profound sense of anger at God - though not disbelief - with the mother never again regularly attending church and Mrs Jeavons herself remaining outside the church from her mid-teens to her early thirties.[215]

Conclusion

The chronology of this gradual attrition in the authority of popular religious beliefs and practices is exceedingly difficult to define with certainty. Some of the identified causes were clearly having a local impact well before the Second World War. The churches and chapels were already finding it difficult to compete with commercial and other providers of leisure - not least the cinema - particularly in Dudley where the disruption of traditional working-class neighbourhoods and the creation of the new council estates were also a feature of the 1930s.

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[214] RPMSI, D14.

The rapid disappearance of the older, traditional working-class communities in Dudley and their slower weakening in the Gornals undermined the socio-cultural context within which many of the salient features of popular religion had retained authority. The physical destruction of communities characterised by a high degree of cultural homogeneity was reinforced by the rapid increase in opportunities to encounter worlds of new ideas through education, geographical and social mobility, the media and the increasing racial - and hence cultural and religious - diversification of local society.

Nevertheless, the Second World War seems to have been a watershed in terms of attitudes and aspirations for one's children. If popular religious beliefs and practices had been vitally supported by a regular childhood involvement in the local church and chapel and by the authority of traditions passed on by parents, the more liberal attitude to child-rearing and disinclination to 'push' one's beliefs too forcefully on to one's children, characteristic of the generation which raised children after the War, was not only a marked change in popular religion in its own right, but could go some way towards explaining the sharp decline in the incidence of young adults calling upon the church to mark the traditional rites of passage in the 1960s.

The relative prosperity of the 1950s brought material and leisure opportunities previously unattainable, providing secular alternatives to the spiritual promises and social activities of religious institutions. Such changes, together with the intensified disinclination to a resigned acceptance of one's lot in the context of such opportunities, rendered the traditional answers of the churches to questions of theodicy unacceptable to many, thus striking at what, it has been argued, constituted one of the principal foundations of a popular religious theism: the tendency for God to be invoked as the means of providing meaning to the otherwise incomprehensible gaps in human experience.[216]

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[215] RPMSI, D20.

[216] Nicholas Abercrombie, John Baker, Sebastian Brett and Jane Foster, 'Superstition and Religion: the God of the Gaps', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 3 (1970), pp. 93-129.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The research for this study has been informed by an implicit hypothesis: that the prevalence of working-class religious belief, practice and experience has been underestimated in an influential, though now not uncontested, historiographical tradition. As such, it is intended that the thesis should add to a small, though growing, corpus of studies which challenge some of the assumptions of both sociologists and historians who expound variations on the secularisation theme, by exploring the hidden religion of popular belief and practice, that David Martin has termed 'subterranean theologies'.[1] It is clear from the evidence adduced in the foregoing chapters, and in a number of recent studies which have informed the thinking of this one, that it is unsafe to infer religious apathy and indifference from the evidence of widespread abstention from public worship, as nineteenth-century commentators were wont to do, many twentieth-century historians having been inclined to agree. Nevertheless, as the penultimate chapter demonstrates, the twentieth-century Black Country exemplifies those well-established historical opposites, continuity and change.

Recent research by theologians and sociologists into non-institutional religion has focused on what has been termed 'implicit religion', marking a change in emphasis from studies of 'popular religion'.[2] The change has been towards Luckmann's identification of religion with matters of 'ultimate value'. In Edward Bailey's analysis, for example, the sanctity of the self and individual autonomy and the importance of having a value system appear to be the roots of modern religiosity in western societies, preceding Christian morality and Christian creeds which may (and often still do) form part of the cultural context within which answers to the more fundamental religious impulses of the individual are found. This is a valid means of addressing

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[1] David Martin, 'The Unknown Gods of the English', *The Advancement of Science*, 23, no. 108 (June 1966), pp. 56-60.

[2] The University of Middlesex is now home to a centre for the study of 'implicit religion' at which Edward Bailey is visiting professor. Since 1998 there has also been a journal, *Implicit Religion*, a product of the formation of the Centre.

the secularisation debate in so far as it highlights the extent to which motives, generated by beliefs which cannot be construed as wholly rational or utilitarian, continue significantly to shape individual behaviour and human interaction. This study, however, has not sought to re-define religion in such existential terms, but has adopted a more intuitive and substantive concept of religion. It has focused on the ways in which respondents believed, and acted upon the belief, that it is possible to establish a link with, and to influence and be influenced by, a superempirical realm. It has explored the ways in which such beliefs and activities were shaped by orthodox Christian and popular folk traditions. This conclusion will therefore provide a brief assessment of the significance of the findings presented in the foregoing chapters for the secularisation debate and for the historiography of British working-class religion, before concluding with a review of the methodological problems and potentials of oral testimony for illuminating aspects of popular religion in the twentieth century.

Secularisation and Popular Religion

That a decline in adherence to the churches in terms of the conventionally used numerical indices - membership figures, Easter communions etc. - was a feature of the twentieth century as a whole is undeniable.[3] However, sociologists of secularisation have also emphasised the importance of concerns about respectability in the continued adherence to the churches well beyond a period when the metaphysical claims of the churches were of central concern to many adherents. Susan Budd, for example, contrasts the late twentieth century with a recent past:

> The *meaning* of church attendance as a significant moral and social boundary has been almost completely eroded. Class solidarity and consumption patterns are now more important than respectability, and morality is widely seen as the arbiter of religion and not *vice-versa*.[4]

Historians have also noted the concern for respectability evident in working-class attitudes to church and religious practices.[5] In Dudley and Gornal, some popular religious practices

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[3] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Church-Goers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977), p. 113; Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 26-30.

[4] Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850-1960* (1977), p. 6.

amongst both regular and irregular churchgoers continued importantly to symbolise respectability, and oral evidence suggests that the survival of such practices is at least in part attributable to a concern for social conformity and acceptance. The rituals of baptism, church weddings and Sunday observance, for example, were all inflected with a degree of concern for such matters. In the Gornals, where social conformity was informally policed by the much longer enduring kinship, neighbourhood and community networks, digressions from such social norms were, throughout the period, rare and frowned upon. On the new Dudley council estates, the absence of established communities, and the growing tendency for the assertion of the privacy of the individual inward-looking household, combined with a less pronounced concern for respectability amongst the lower working class, to undermine such traditional social mores. If their force was still felt by many on the estates during the 1930s and the early post-war years, by the later years of the period under study, this was no longer unequivocally the case.

It is clear from the evidence adduced in the foregoing chapters, however, that irregular church attendance cannot safely be assumed to be an expression of religious indifference and that occasional observance of religious rites cannot be explained wholly in terms of concerns about respectability. Religious belief and practice continued to play a vital role in the lives of many of those who were irregular in their attendance at Sunday worship. Private practices and beliefs - sometimes given expression in public arenas other than those of the church or chapel, such as the public house, the countryside or the outdoor service as well as in the domestic environment - were typical of many such people. Moreover, a rational utilitarian orientation was absent from many areas of life, when people turned to the superempirical realm as a means of finding explanations, comfort and hope.

It is clear from the evidence of Dudley and Gornal interviewees that the local representatives of institutional religion - the churches and chapels - played a major part in defining the private religious beliefs and practices of many well into the twentieth century, not least through the major formative influence of Sunday School. Again, however, experiences differed according to geographical area. The continuity of experiences in Gornal, where Sunday

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[5] e.g. Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History Journal*, 14 (1986), pp. 31-49; *idem*,, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (1974); Alan Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey, 1880-1939' (PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1987).

School attendance levels remained high throughout the period - and where parental support for the Sunday School, at least in terms of Anniversary attendance, extended throughout the constituency of regular and irregular attenders - meant that the influence of church-defined religious belief remained pervasive. The disruption caused by the removal of families from the old slum areas of Dudley to the new estates broke the habit of Sunday school attendance among many children during the 1930s. As adults, many of these children would no longer feel that church and Sunday school was a central part of the inheritance which they owed to their children.

If the secularisation of consciousness did not keep pace with institutional secularisation, it is also the case that popular religious beliefs, practices and experiences in Dudley and Gornal were not moulded exclusively in shapes recognised by the churches, but drew extensively on folk and oral traditions. The churches and orthodox Christian creeds rarely enjoyed a monopoly on popular beliefs. But generalisation across the different geographical areas would, once more, be misleading. A (predominantly Methodist) evangelical core in the Gornals was increasingly inclined to draw a sharp distinction between superstition and Biblical Christianity. Whilst the Gornal villages retained a strong sense of community and a marked degree of isolation from the social changes which were affecting Dudley, that core was being leavened by the permeation of an evangelical culture from beyond the boundaries of the village. Influences from outside the villages tended to undermine the authority and credibility of older traditions which had combined folk with church discourses, within as well as without the church-going constituency, by highlighting their parochial and unorthodox nature: the Cliff College Missions of 1937 and 1948, visits by local people to Cliff College and Capernwray and local young people leaving the area to serve in the Forces, do National Service, or study in Higher Education, then returning with new ideas and expectations. Such people tended to replace the personnel who had previously dominated the core of evangelical Methodism in the area, converting its central values from ones which had been largely congruent with the society of which they were a part, combining the two traditions of popular belief, to ones which were increasingly secular and modern in their orientation to everyday life and more exclusively bookish and Biblical in their location of the authority for metaphysical beliefs. The two

discourses - folk and orthodox Christian - previously to a large extent intermingled, were increasingly regarded as distinct.

The evidence presented in this study in many ways confirms, in a different geographical context, at least until the Second World War, the portrait of popular religion in Southwark presented by Williams. The combination of church and folk discourses which, Williams argued, characterised Southwark, was a marked feature of popular religious beliefs in Dudley and Gornal until the Second World War. It is thus important to re-emphasise the point that such forms of popular religious belief and practice were not confined to the early modern period, as Keith Thomas's thesis may lead one to believe, nor in the context of the modern period to the rural and isolated village setting, as the work of James Obelkevich and David Clark might suggest.[6]

Popular religiosity was characterised by a wide range of beliefs which might be termed 'folkish' or superstitious, as well as orthodox Christian beliefs. The transmission of such knowledge took place through formal institutional channels - the church, the school, religious literature - but also through informal channels, such as the family and the community in the form of oral traditions, particularly by women, within communities and through generations. Popular religious beliefs underpinned the unity of the family, providing an emotional and spiritual linkage with the dead and a line of continuity (until the post-war period) with the next generation, forming a central part of what was considered the essential heritage to pass on to one's children. Popular religion drew on, but also reinforced, the bonds of community in established neighbourhoods, particularly in the Gornal villages, where special annual services continued to draw people together at the local churches and chapels which also served as venues for other local events. Moreover, in such communities the local church or chapel served as a potent symbol of local intra-village or town identity and pride, epitomised by the fervour of the Sunday School Anniversaries. Where the communities and the established traditions which accompanied them had been disrupted, as on the new Dudley estates, the churches found it

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[6] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1978); James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976); David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982).

impossible to generate anything like the same degree of enthusiasm. In these respects, the findings of this study reinforce the arguments presented by Williams in her study of Southwark.

However, the evidence of the foregoing chapters also develops and amends the characterisation of popular religion in a number of important ways. First, popular religious beliefs, particularly those of a folkish or superstitious nature, have hitherto been considered by historians as characteristic of those on the fringes of involvement with institutional religiosity. Williams's excellent and fascinating study of Southwark, for example, draws a distinction between popular religion and the ideal of the true believer, giving the impression that popular religiosity was the preserve of the infrequent churchgoers who are the subject of her study.[7]

The evidence from Gornal and Dudley suggests that the margins of popular religiosity in this respect are ill-defined and that many of those who were regular attenders at some churches and that some regular attenders at all churches should be considered as profoundly influenced by such popular religious beliefs. As David Clark has shown in the different social context of the 1960s fishing village,[8] folk beliefs were far from being the preserve of those on the fringes of the churches. The persistence of folk theology even amongst those who were regular attenders and the similarity of the beliefs of regular and irregular attenders has been one of the major points of emphasis throughout the thesis. The explanation for this similarity consists in the co-existence of two different sources of authority for religious beliefs. The first was the teaching of religious institutions, with which all interviewees had childhood contact through Sunday School. The formative influences of childhood years in terms of establishing a fundamental set of beliefs and attitudes meant that the beliefs of adults who were irregular churchgoers were, in terms of orthodox Christian teachings, very similar to those who continued to attend church regularly as adults. The decision not to attend regularly as an adult was not the outward sign of a rejection of religious beliefs, but tended to be based on the absence of a family tradition of adult church attendance and the belief that, as with day school, once one had learnt what it was necessary to know one no longer needed to attend. Conversely,

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[7] Sarah Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture: A Study of the South London Borough of Southwark c.1880-1939' (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 1993).

[8] David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge, 1982), *passim*.

the decision to attend church as an adult was significantly influenced by regular parental attendance and by the opportunities for regular sociability and should not be read simply as an expression of personal piety. Regular adult attendance unquestionably furthered religious knowledge, but the majority of regular and irregular attenders shared a set of fundamental beliefs: in a benevolent God whose concern for the world is expressed through the Gospel stories and who intervenes in the contemporary world in a variety of ways, and that that intervention can be influenced by petitionary prayer.

The persistence of folk beliefs across the constituencies of both regular and irregular churchgoers may seem more surprising, given the apparent inconsistency with orthodox Christian beliefs and the expressed hostility of clergymen. The explanation, however, lies in the existence of the second source of authority for religious beliefs: that of oral traditions and their bearers. As Williams has argued of Southwark, and David Vincent has illustrated on a broader canvas, oral and literary traditions continued to co-exist to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond in popular culture.[9] Oral traditions, the form taken by folkish and superstitious beliefs, were transmitted within families, primarily through the mother, and depended upon the authority of parents and elders. The context within which such beliefs were articulated and rituals practised tended to be within the home. The clergy became aware of those which extended beyond the confines of the home - particularly those which, like the meanings attributed to churchings and baptisms, were a syncretism of orthodox Christian rituals with Christian and superstitious beliefs - and voiced their complaints accordingly. It seems likely, however, that most were unaware of the nature and extent of such beliefs.[10] An oral tradition of folk and superstitious beliefs was thus accommodated for most of the time in a peaceful co-existence with orthodox Christian creeds. Folk beliefs and superstitions constituted, for both the regular and the irregular churchgoer, a significant component of a cultural inheritance which was vitally linked to the family unit. Observance of such rituals was, in part, an expression of emotional connections within the family. They were passed down through the generations

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[9] Williams, 'Religious Belief and Popular Culture', pp. 313-14; David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture; England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989).

[10] In a letter to the author, the Reverend Perry Smith, Methodist minister for the Gornal section in the late 1950s, claimed that 'there was none of that' in response to a question about superstitions in Gornal. He was quite clearly wrong.

within families and their observance was a means of expressing respect for one's parents and for the 'old ways'. They also, however, provided a means of seeking to exert control over a relatively unpredictable environment in ways which could seem more accessible and more direct than that which was offered by prayer to God whose ways were, in any case, ultimately inscrutable. During the years before the Second World War and the arrival of the Welfare State, particularly the difficult years of the Depression in the 1920s and early 30s, many people in the Black Country were faced with the possibility of poverty, ill-health and an early death. Instrumental means of redress were absent or inadequate. Within such a context, the oral traditions were credible. At the very least, the connection between bad luck and certain omens or the failure to observe certain rituals was always liable to be demonstrated and demonstrable.

The evidence of Dudley and Gornal residents suggests a further qualification to the portrayal of popular religion. Williams argued that elements of folk belief and practice were interwoven with Christian beliefs into a single discourse of popular religiosity. Evidence from interviews in Dudley and the Gornals amongst the generation which reached adulthood before the Second World War tends to confirm this argument, with interviewees being similarly inclined to believe that it was, or at least might be, possible to influence worldly events at a local and personal level by the manipulation of the superempirical realm through lucky charms etc. as well as by prayer to God. Moreover, Mass-Observation reports strongly suggest that such beliefs were still common throughout the country during the 1940s and early 1950s, particularly amongst women.[11]

The evidence of interviewees amongst the generations that reached adulthood during or after the Second World War, however, suggests that there was an increasing tendency to regard 'superstition' and 'religion' as discrete aspects of belief in the supernatural rather than as components of a single religious discourse. Interviewees commonly distinguished between a vaguely perceived superempirical sphere in which luck - rather than pure chance - operated, and the workings of God and the efficacy of prayer. Both regular and irregular churchgoers combined Christian and folk or superstitious beliefs, but it was not always a seamless discourse. Superstition was increasingly perceived to be the mark of their parents' generation,

[11] e.g. M-O A: FR2112, 7 June 1944, 'Superstition'.

and their own superstitions an inheritance from their parents which they never took quite so seriously. This can be partly explained by the disintegration of kinship networks attendant upon the dismemberment of communities during the large-scale re-housing schemes of the 1930s and 50s in Dudley. Beliefs and practices which had carried the authority of parents, elderly relatives and much of the older generation within the local communities of the old working-class areas of central Dudley had previously been reinforced by the proximity of older believers and the consequent regular insistence on their observance amongst the younger generation. When the latter found themselves in an entirely new residential area, surrounded largely by strangers, such beliefs and customs came increasingly to be associated with an old way of life characteristic of their parents' generation. The occasional encounters with the passion with which such beliefs were held by the older generation - particularly in the case of the churching of women following childbirth - occasioned surprise. The usual response was to fall in with parental (usually maternal) demands and to observe the old customs, if without any great conviction. At times, however, the old beliefs were regarded by the younger generation as repugnant.[12] Women, for example, were increasingly reluctant to accept the connotations of uncleanness attached to the ritual of churching.

The twentieth century, and the post-Second World War years in particular, extended educational opportunities, offered the possibility of upward mobility and increasingly exposed people in Dudley and Gornal, as elsewhere, to a world beyond, and more diverse than, that of their own communities, through the media of radio and television and through inward and outward migration. Upward mobility and educational opportunities were important causes of the transition from a mixed culture - oral and literary - to one which emphasised the authority of the written word, at the expense of an oral culture.

The nature and extent of the re-shaping of religious belief and practice, and the developing sense of a distinction between 'religion' and superstition differed according to context and experiences. It was amongst those interviewees who had succeeded in moving from a working-class childhood to middle-class adult life that the strongest disinclination to accept

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[12] E.g. RPMSI, D10 and D21.

folk and superstitious beliefs was to be found. Such upward mobility was often accompanied by a reinforced sense of the authority of the church - literary and bookish in its emphases - and, particularly amongst Gornal Methodists, of the importance of Biblical authority for all beliefs relating to a superempirical realm. It was in such contexts that the authority of the parental generation was most obviously undermined. The rejection of parental authority on matters of religious belief could produce a Christianity cleansed of superstitions, as was the case in Gornal evangelical Methodism. This modernisation of religious practice and belief - reinforced by the contact with a wider evangelical culture as has already been noted - was the alternative to a drift towards religious agnosticism. A culture which increasingly accepted the authority of the written word and of national media could accommodate either response. It could not, for much longer, accommodate the continued authority of local oral traditions.

Finally, as chapter 7 has argued, the nature and extent of popular religion changed not solely in terms of a sharper distinction between Christian beliefs and superstitions, but was also subject to a combination of social, cultural and economic changes which precipitated its decline. The rate of that decline differed by area. In Dudley, the disruption of traditional communities and the consequent absence of a strong sense of identity with a local church, the earlier and greater provision of alternative leisure facilities and the impact of immigrant communities from the 1950s onwards all precipitated an earlier decline of aspects of popular religious belief and practice than was the case in Gornal. But other factors - the impact of the Second World War, increasing material prosperity and mobility, changing attitudes to children and the family, the authority of education, science and of secular modes of thought in general - had begun to have a marked effect in the Gornals as well as Dudley before the end of the period.

No single factor has been identified as a sufficient cause for this decline, nor is it at all easy to be sure of the chronology. The difficulties in this respect lie partly in the problems of a

methodology which offers considerable insights into the nature and extent of popular religious beliefs, practices and experiences, but which also possesses inherent interpretative difficulties.

A Methodological Review

The evidence for the nature and extent of popular religious practice, belief and experience presented in this study has predominantly taken the form of oral testimony. A substantial body of oral testimony has been gathered, with a total of sixty interviewees from the different geographical areas constituting a cross-section both by gender and by degrees of involvement in institutional religion. The resulting evidence, totalling in the region of 150 hours of recorded interviews, provides a legitimate basis - perhaps an unavoidable imperative - for reflection on some of the methodological problems and potentials.

The reliability of oral testimony, as the opening chapter noted, has been frequently questioned.[13] At one level, the unease focuses on the factual accuracy of recall. But such a problem is lessened when the purpose of the research is not to reconstruct a unique and specific sequence of events, but to explore the repeated activities of everyday life and the mentalities which accompanied such activities. Such has been the purpose of this study. It would be disingenuous, of course, to deny that the fruits of the oral historian's researches would, in some respects, be the richer were his or her interviewees blessed with a faultless memory for dates and other specific details. Recalling certain characteristics of 'the vicar', for example, but being unable to date or name him occasionally presented tantalising but elusive glimpses of the interface between popular and clerical attitudes. On the whole, however, written sources provided a chronological framework around which the interpretation of oral testimony could be organised and interpreted.

The potential of oral testimony to reveal the subterranean theologies of popular religion was questioned by Robert Moore, who suggested that 'beliefs incompatible with conventional Christian theology are unlikely to be recorded as they will not feature in sermons, nor will they be recounted by respondents talking about "religion"'.[14] It is clear, however, not only from the

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[13] For a summary of such criticisms, see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 68-71 and Thompson's editorial in *Oral History*, 18 no. 1 (1990), p. 24.

[14] Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics*, p. 94.

testimony gathered during the course of the research for this study but also from the evidence presented in previous studies, such as Clark's study of Staithes and Williams's study of Southwark, that interviewees will, and do, readily talk about beliefs not sanctioned by the orthodox theologies of the churches. Such beliefs will certainly not appear in sermons - nor in any other written source, except in folklore collections and survey work such as that of Mass-Observation and Geoffey Gorer - and therein lies one of the most important justifications for the use of oral testimony: it may be fraught with methodological and interpretative difficulties but for a probing examination of popular religious beliefs there exists no comparable alternative material.

It is true, however, that there are difficulties in eliciting testimony about beliefs. In some instances, such difficulties reflect not so much a sense of potential contradiction with the theology of the churches as of incongruity with contemporary culture and a consequent degree of unease and embarrassment. Informative recollections of folk and superstitious beliefs sometimes only followed from direct questioning, suggesting that the interviewer will sometimes need to provide a degree of legitimation to certain areas of religious belief, whilst seeking to avoid leading the discussion to the extent that the resulting testimony fails to reflect the over-riding concerns of the interviewee. In other instances, the suppression of certain important aspects of religious experience and belief (or disbelief) during first interviews was revealed only during the course of subsequent interviews when a bond of trust had been established within the context of a more relaxed conversational meeting. Accounts of religious experiences, in particular, were particularly commonly produced in second or later interviews, although appropriate contexts had existed during the first meeting. On the other hand, that which was personal, private, and perhaps particularly uncomfortable was occasionally explicitly suppressed: Mrs Smart, for example, lost any belief in God during her teens as a consequence of the absence of answer to prayer, but when asked what she had prayed for replied 'No, I'll not tell you that!'[15]

A more serious challenge to the value of oral testimony - and to the evidence adduced in this study - is presented by the suggestion that 'people cannot, or do not, distinguish with

[15] RPMSI, D25.

sufficient care between their current ideas and those that they held at an earlier period'.[16] If one substitutes 'beliefs' for 'ideas', one is confronted with a central problem for this study and one which, perhaps inevitably, remains partially unresolved. The point is implicit in Hugh McLeod's assessment of the oral evidence for popular religion. Optimistic about its potential to illuminate previously unexplored dimensions of religiosity McLeod cautiously highlighted the limitations of oral evidence. 'It is unlikely,' he warned, 'that many people would be able to explore with any degree of precision the complexities and nuances of beliefs they held some sixty years ago, or the processes by which these changed'.[17] Indeed, to explore religious belief retrospectively through time - as the historian must attempt to do - is fraught with difficulty. Religious belief is perhaps the most difficult dimension of religiosity to investigate. The methodological problems of unearthing evidence of beliefs held not in the present but between thirty and eighty years ago should not be underestimated.

It was, in some cases, difficult to be confident that interviewees were not attributing to their earlier selves, beliefs which, it is easy to see, could have been significantly affected by developments of more recent years. For example, for some interviewees a belief in the possibility of miraculous healings was undoubtedly reinforced, perhaps acquired, through contact with recent media coverage of, and popular religious literature concerning, American-style charismatic healing services, to which they occasionally referred as a justification for belief in miracles.[18] Perhaps the important point, however, is that such beliefs were, and had throughout the period been, part of a repertoire of what it was possible to believe. The near universal experience of Sunday School and, for some, an adult life in close connection with a local church, combined with the transmission of oral traditions, rendered at least reasonable a belief in a God who intervenes in the world or in some superempirical realm which affects human lives. That such beliefs were better sustained in certain social, cultural and economic settings than in others was the argument of the penultimate chapter. It was argued that post-war developments have, on the whole, accelerated the disintegration of popular religious beliefs and

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[16] Trevor Lummis, 'Structure and validity in oral evidence', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (1998), pp. 273-83 (p. 280).

[17] Hugh McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Working-Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History*, 14 (1986), pp. 31-49 (p. 37).

[18] e.g. RPMSI, D8 (Mrs Downing).

practices. It is hardly surprising that there may have been certain countervailing forces - for example the New Age movement, eastern mystic religions, TV evangelism, astrology and some of the more spiritual faces of environmentalism - during the twenty years after the War and since. That such forces have tended to be communicated through impersonal media, commercially available and often brought directly into the home, without any vital connection to family, neighbourhood or local community, will surely mean that the trend towards the private and the eclectic will be reinforced.

The social and cultural changes identified in chapter 7 are viewed largely unfavourably by the majority of interviewees. Common amongst interviewees was the perception of social and moral decline, whilst the days of their childhood, youth and even young adulthood were frequently recalled as better and safer. This presents a further interpretative problem for the historian and is precisely the sort of danger which those most sceptical of the value of oral testimony have emphasised in their criticisms.[19] The tendency to romanticise the past and to view one's childhood and young adulthood nostalgically is probably universal in contemporary western society.[20] Amongst elderly interviewees its intrusion is almost inevitable. To a degree, this is to re-state at the individual level, the problem identified by Jan Vansina in relation to the oral traditions of groups:

> oral traditions are not just a source about the past, but [...] an account of how people have interpreted it. As such oral tradition is not only a raw source. It is a hypothesis, similar to the historian's own interpretation of the past.[21]

Oral interviewees, like anybody else, have interpreted their own life stories retrospectively.[22]

Nostalgia was not, however, the only shaping force on interviewees' recollections. Some, particularly those with the most active Christian faith at the time of interview, provided

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[19] The most notorious being the comments of A.J.P. Taylor: 'In this matter I am an almost total sceptic... Old men drooling about their youth - No.' (cited in Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1988), p. 70).

[20] See, for example, Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday; A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, 1979). For nostalgia as a problem in oral testimony, see Alistair Thomson, 'Life Histories, Adult Learning and Identity', in Julia Swindells (ed.), *The Uses of Autobiography* (1995), pp. 163-65.

[21] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition As History* (1985), p. 196.

[22] It would doubtless be possible, and illuminating, to analyse the oral testimonies in terms of the rhetorical devices and narrative structures employed by respondents, though that has not been the purpose of this study. Much work of this sort is now being undertaken. See, for example, Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge, 1992); Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (eds.), *Narrative and Genre* (1998).

accounts which were clearly celebratory and teleological: difficult lives negotiated within the guiding framework of Divine providence. The problem was more overt in cases where interviewees had clearly had occasion to tell their life stories - or parts of them - on a regular basis. For example, Mr Beckley, a Primitive Methodist local preacher and probation worker, was interviewed on two separate occasions a year apart and his accounts were, in places, verbatim. The points at which his accounts converged most closely were those where he believed his life had been directed by God.[23]

If one accepts oral testimony in its dual status - as both an account of the past and a narrative form given shape in the present - it is revealing to identify the catalysts which generate the nostalgic or the celebratory modes of expression. In so far as personal identity is formed through a dialogue between present reflection and past experiences, it is important not simply to dismiss nostalgic recollections or teleological accounts as empirically worthless, but to identify which elements of past experience - located socially and temporally - continue to have the symbolic resonance to evoke a whole past way of life and which are defined as crucial biographical moments. Occasions such as the Sunday School Anniversary and the evocative power of favourite hymns learnt at Sunday School, for example, have been highlighted as having just such a resonance for many interviewees, indicating the centrality of popular religion within the inheritance of popular culture well into the twentieth century. Confrontations with illness, death and life-changing decisions for some provided the crucial moments around which lasting religious beliefs - or religious scepticism - came into focus and provided the pivotal points for the construction of individual life stories.

It is arguable, however, that the oscillation between greater and lesser degrees of credence in various aspects of popular religious belief was the product not only of economic and socio-cultural changes and of personal crises but also of the human life-cycle common to all. This suggests that the earlier point about the difficulty for interviewees to discriminate between current and past attitudes may be particularly problematic in a study of religious beliefs. Reference to the inscrutability of fate or the Divine will, for example, may accompany a perceived constriction in the possibilities for realising personal choices and, as such, may be

[23] RPMSI, D2.

particularly characteristic of the elderly. Sometimes this was recognised, explicitly acknowledged and related to personal experiences. Mrs Hill, for example, stated 'there is a fate [...] I think the Lord makes the burden for the person [...] our path is already marked out', but reflected that before the loss of her husband in 1969 she would have been more inclined to feel that 'we make our own lives, we make our own decisions'.[24]

The importance of religious beliefs amongst the elderly was explicitly acknowledged in some cases. Mr and Mrs Sankey and Mrs Brookes emphasised the point after giving an account of their recent attendance at a funeral, when Mrs Sankey commented on the feeling of having been 'lifted' by the service:

Mr S A sort of relief, a sort of relief. It's funny, I mean really and truly you can't express the feeling really. You'll find it will come to you in later life.

Mrs S You feel better.

Mr S When I was like you, it never bothered me. But I do now.

Mrs S I think you do as you're getting older.

Q. Your faith has become more important as you've got older?

Mr S Yes, definitely.

Mrs B I think you've got more time to think about it.[25]

It must be acknowledged that the oral historian cannot avoid studying his or her subjects in the present as well as the past, but the point to emphasise again is that the subjects of study are a product of their own life histories and that contemporary beliefs and experiences - indeed personal identity into old age - are profoundly inflected by the beliefs and practices acquired during childhood and youth. If personal religious beliefs and practices waxed and waned with the life-cycle - many in particular emphasising that the years of child-rearing left little time for religious practices, for example - on the scale of the personal *long durée* they were characterised, for many, more by continuity than by change.

As the penultimate chapter has argued, however, popular religion did undergo significant changes during the course of the period. In many respects, the greater dangers to the

[24] RPMSI, D14.
[25] RPMSI, G2.

oral historian are those where life stories are characterised by ideological and attitudinal changes rather than by continuity. Some interviewees found it possible to identify key moments in their lives which triggered a major change in their disposition towards religious beliefs and practice. Many did not. As Hugh McLeod has observed, it is difficult for interviewees, and hence for the oral historian, to identify with any precision the ways in which a series of subtle changes in belief occurred over a long period, or to pinpoint the timing of such changes. The historian can only identify from oral testimony what appear to be historical causative factors from the issues discussed during an interview which must necessarily take place in the present. It is possible then to trace the contextual changes - social, cultural, economic - which produced such factors. It is unlikely, of course, that such changes had an immediate effect on popular religious beliefs and practices. It is far more likely that there was some time lag between the two developments and in some cases it is impossible to be certain that the changes identified in the penultimate chapter were clearly discernible by the end of the period under study. It may well be, for example, that the presence of non-Christian faith communities in Dudley pre-dated by many years the trend towards relativism in popular attitudes towards religious beliefs, a position which, as chapter 7 noted, was sometimes justified in terms of religious pluralism. What can be claimed, however, is that if the determinants of the decline of popular religion have been correctly identified, the determinants themselves were unquestionably amongst the salient socio-cultural changes in Dudley and Gornal before 1965. If Callum Brown is correct in arguing that the period up to the 1960s constituted an 'age of puritanism', a period characterised overwhelmingly by continuity of religiously-inspired attitudes and beliefs, it may well be that the revolutionary changes of that decade were, in some respects, the fruits of the coming of age of a generation which grew up in markedly different circumstances and under a significantly different parental regime to that which their own parents had experienced.

A local study inevitably provokes many further questions whilst seeking to provide some provisional answers to others. The extent to which the changes in the selected communities were typical is clearly a key issue. Socio-cultural changes in Dudley, including the changing patterns of leisure provision, the post-war immigration and, in particular, the depopulation of the town centre and construction of large council estates, were replicated in

many other large towns and cities. The Gornal villages, on the other hand, could be regarded as a typical, if concentrated, expression of inter-war working-class communities. But caution is necessary. Methodism, for example, exerted an unusually pervasive influence throughout the Gornal villages, where six chapels co-existed (and, to a degree, competed) throughout the period. Furthermore, both Dudley and Gornal suffered particularly acutely during the Depression years of the late 1920s and early 1930s; whether the popular religious emphasis on practical Christianity had the same practical consequences in areas less affected by unemployment and poverty could only be answered by further exploration.

Further studies of different localities are needed to move the debate further. Moreover, the current study stops in the 1960s. If Callum Brown is correct to argue that this decade marked the end of an age of 'puritanism', the end of pervasive, moralistic popular Christianity, a transformation caught up in a wholesale revolution in social and cultural concerns, the results of such dramatic changes can only be explored by the historian brave enough to forego the benefits of distance and hindsight and move the study of popular religion, whatever its forms, into the last thirty years.

Appendix 1

Interviewees, Biographical Details

Note: a) the letter and number prefixing each name is an interview code; b) all names are pseudonyms; c) PE and WNE are abbreviations for, respectively, Priory Estate and Wren's Nest Estate.

All interviews carried out by the author are referenced in footnotes with the pre-fix RPMSI, followed by the individual interview code which indicates either a Dudley or a Gornal resident (e.g. D1, G1).

RPMSI, Dudley interviewees:

D1: Mrs Beattie, b. 1915 in Stafford Street, central Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father was a miner killed in action during WWI, and she was brought up by her mother and grandmother (who lived with them) until her family was moved down to the WNE, c.1935, where she has lived ever since. She attended St Thomas ('Top Church') Sunday School as a child, but stopped attending any place of worship soon after coming to live on the WNE. She worked for periods in shops and canteens in Dudley.

D2: Mr Beckley, b. 1902 in Goole. His father was a Primitive Methodist minister and came to the Black Country in the early 1920s. Since 1925, Mr Beckley has lived in the Paradise area of Dudley, regularly attending Vicar Street (Primitive) Methodist chapel, becoming a local preacher and running a Young Men's Bible Class. He worked as a probation officer in the town.

D3: Mr Bedford, b. 1925 in St James Terrace, central Dudley, to parents from local families. His father was a labourer. He moved with his family to the Wren's Nest Estate c. 1936. Mr Bedford attended Salop Street Methodist Sunday school between the ages of about 8 and 11 but stopped attending any place of worship when the family moved to the WNE and never regularly attended thereafter. Since moving as a child to the WNE, he has lived there all his life except for a brief spell living in Kate's Hill following his marriage. He worked in a factory making riddles, saw active service in WWII and then worked as an outdoor labourer.

D4: Mr Carter, b. 1930 in Spring Gardens (no longer in existence, formerly off Bath Street, near the Gas Works), central Dudley, to parents from local families. His father was a factory worker and labourer. His family moved to the WNE c. 1935/6. Mr Carter occasionally attended St Christopher's (WNE) Sunday school as a child, but has never been a regular attender at any place of worship since. He worked independently selling logs for a few years, but then became a foundry worker. He has lived on the WNE almost continuously since moving there as a child.

D4: Mrs Carter, b. 1935 in Dock Lane, central Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father worked as a sheet metal worker for the Co-op in Cradley Heath. The family moved to WNE when Mrs Carter was only 6 months old. She regularly attended St Christopher's Sunday school as a child, but rarely attended any place of worship as an adult. She worked before and after the birth of her son, either in cleaning or unskilled factory labour. She has lived on the WNE almost continuously since moving there as a child.

D5: Mrs Cash, b. 1925 in Bridgwater Crescent, Kate's Hill, Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father was a stamper, a skilled worker in the steel industry and her mother worked as a secretary until Mrs Cash was born. Mrs Cash attended Sunday school at St Edmund's

church as a child and has remained a regular attender there throughout her life. She lived in Kate's Hill until 1963, only living outside Dudley whilst engaged in War service during the Second World War. She became a primary school teacher and, some years after 1965, a headmistress in a local school.

D6: Mrs Causer, b. 1926, Brewery Fields, Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father was a driver for Dudley council. Her family moved to the PE in 1932 and Mrs Causer attended Priory Methodist Sunday school as a child. She also occasionally attended Sunday school at Christ Church Congregational on Hall Street and St Francis Sunday school, PE. As a young adult she did not attend church, only returning to regular attendance c. 1960, first at St Thomas and then St Francis. She has lived on the PE or WNE since childhood apart from 4 years in Tividale, following her marriage. Before and after the care of a young family, she worked as a shop assistant and Post Office worker.

D7: Mr Dickens, b. 1924, Scotts Green, Dudley, to a father from a local family, and a mother originally from Wrexham. His father was a timekeeper for the Earl of Dudley's pits and steelworks. He has been a regular attender at Woodside (Wesleyan) Methodist chapel, with which his family had strong connections, throughout his life. His family moved to Woodside and then Holly Hall, Dudley between 1934 and 1945. As an adult Mr Dickens has lived in Kingswinford, Cradley Heath, Stourbridge and, since 1960, Sedgley. He worked as an industrial chemist, reaching a management position before retirement.

D7: Mrs Dickens, b. 1927, Woodside, to parents from local families. Her father was an electrician. She has been a regular attender at Woodside (Wesley) Methodist chapel, with which her family had strong connections, throughout her life. Married Mr Dickens (above) in 1950.

D8: Mr Downing, b. 1922 in Oldbury. His mother was from Birmingham and his father was Irish. His father was a police sergeant, but died when Mr Downing was only 3. His mother worked at a chemical factory. Mr Downing attended several local Sunday schools in Oldbury before becoming a regular at the parish church and was confirmed aged 13. He moved to Wolverhampton Street, Dudley, with his wife in 1948 and remained there until 1966. During this time, he attended St James, Eve Hill, on a fairly regular basis (around once a month). Mr Downing worked as an engineer, reaching a managerial position before retirement in 1982.

D8: Mrs Downing, b. 1921 in Tividale, to a father from a local family and a mother from Birmingham. Her father worked in the local Revo factory, starting on the factory floor and reaching the position of supervisor before retirement. Mrs Downing attended Sunday school at St Michael's church, Tividale from the age of 9, was confirmed there and attended regularly until she moved with her husband to Wolverhampton Street in Dudley in 1948. She then attended St James Eve Hill as regularly as the demands of a young family allowed.

D9: Mr Green, b. 1913 in London. His father was a vulcaniser. He came to Dudley when in the Worcestershire Regiment during WWII and met his future wife in Pensnett. After the War he returned to Dudley and lived in Wellington Road from 1948 to 1975. He was, in his own words, 'not a religious man'. He worked as a builder.

D10: Mrs Griffiths, b. 1931, Stafford Street, central Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father was a food warehouse supervisor and her mother was a cleaner, but Mrs Griffiths was brought up by her grandparents in Stafford Street. Her grandfather was a master butcher before, and worked in Palethorpes sausage factory after, WWI. Mrs Griffiths attended Sunday school at 'Wesley' Methodist chapel, Wolverhampton Street, but never regularly attended any

place of worship from the age of 16. On her marriage in 1952, she moved to Kent Street, Upper Gornal, then a few years later to Woodsetton. Before marriage she worked in tailoring.

D11: Mr Griffin, b. 1932 in India. His father was a professional soldier and his mother was the daughter of another professional soldier. Mr Griffin was brought up by his grandparents, who brought him back to Dudley to live on the PE, in one of the few privately owned houses on the eastern edge of the Estate, from 1937. His grandfather worked as a loader at the canal at Brierley Hill. Mr Griffin attended St Francis Sunday school occasionally as a boy, but as a teenager started to attend the 'Crusaders' boys' meetings (an Evangelical Bible study group run by the poet Ian Serraillier, then a teacher at Dudley Grammar School) then Vicar Street Young Men's Bible Class. He lived on the PE until 1957, apart from his period of National Service. Mr Griffin became a local preacher and then was ordained for the Methodist ministry in 1957.

D11: Mrs Griffin, b. 1933, Netherton, Dudley. Her father was a policeman, but died when Mrs Griffin was 3. She and her two sisters were sent to a police orphanage in Surrey from 1937 to 1945. Attendance at the Anglican chapel was strictly enforced at the orphanage. She returned to Dudley and lived on the PE to 1948, then lived in Buffery Road, Paradise, Dudley, 1948-56, until her marriage to Mr Griffin (above). When living at Buffery Road, she attended a few services at St John's Kate's Hill and St Thomas before accompanying a friend to Vicar Street Methodist chapel where she thereafter attended regularly, beginning a lifelong active involvement in the Methodist church. She worked as a comptometer operator in several local businesses before 1957.

D12: Mr Grainger, b. 1917, Ruiton Street, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a supervisor of road construction teams for Sedgley Urban District council and his mother worked as a tailor both before and after marriage. Mr Grainger attended St James, Lower Gornal as a boy, but became less regular in attendance during his young adulthood when bringing up a family. He lived in Lower Gornal until 1958 when he moved to the PE so that his terminally ill wife could be near her family. After her death, he became involved on a regular basis at St Francis church. Mr Grainger's career as a tailor was broken only by a period of active service between 1940 and 1947.

D13: Mr Gould, b. 1944, Hellier Street, central Dudley, to parents from local families. His father worked in a warehouse for a wholesale grocery company in Hall Street, and his mother was a cereal packer. His father died when he was only 9. Mr Gould attended St Thomas Sunday school, and has always been a regular attender at Anglican churches, becoming a bell-ringer, sidesman and parish church council member at St Thomas before the age of 21. He lived in Hellier Street until marriage in 1967, when he and his wife lived on the PE and attended St Francis regularly. Mr Gould was a travelling salesman for a Dudley steel manufacturer.

D13: Mrs Gould, b. 1940, Maple Road, PE, to parents from the East Midlands. Her father was a policeman and her mother worked at a grocer's shop. Mrs Gould attended Sunday school at St Francis, PE and has remained a regular attender there ever since. She started working as a primary school teacher in 1961.

D14: Mrs Hill, b. 1925, Brookdale, Lower Gornal, to parents whose families were from Rowley Regis. Her father was an engine winder at Gibbons pit, Gornal. Her father took her as an infant to Zoar (United Methodist) chapel. Mrs Hill's family moved to the PE in 1930 and she attended Sunday school first at St Francis and then, when it was built, at Priory Methodist church. She lived on the PE and then the nearby Old Park Farm Estate until she moved with her husband to Netherton in 1958. Mrs Hill attended special services at Methodist chapels as a young adult whilst raising a family, first at Wellington Road chapel, central Dudley, then in

Netherton. After getting married, she worked as a wages clerk at the Revo factory, Dudley until she had her first child.

D15: Mrs Hewitt, b. 1960, Kate's Hill, Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father was a plasterer and the publican at The Fox Inn, Abberley Street, central Dudley. Mrs Hewitt attended Sunday school at St Thomas at the suggestion of a neighbour. As an adult, she is a regular attender at St Francis church, PE.

D16: Mr Hammond, b. 1927, Great Bridge, Tipton, to a father from Tipton and a mother from Dudley. He moved to Great Hill, central Dudley, where his mother's family lived, when a few weeks old. His father was a polisher and grinder and his mother worked part-time at the 'Scrim' bandage factory. Mr Hammond attended Sunday school at the Old Meeting House, Unitarian chapel, Dudley, and, with his father, Vicar Street Young Men's Bible Class. After National Service, Mr Hammond and his wife lived on the WNE from 1948 to 1951, then moved to Netherton before moving to the Russells Hall Estate in 1968. Mr Hammond stopped regularly attending any place of worship aged about 15 but, together with his wife, attended special services at local Methodist churches, particularly Primrose Hill chapel, Netherton. Mr Hammond worked as a sheet metal worker.

D16: Mrs Hammond, b. c. 1930. An occasional churchgoer as an adult, particularly at Primrose Hill Methodist chapel, Netherton. Other biographical details unknown.

D17: Miss Haywood, b. 1922, Bunns Lane, Kate's Hill, Dudley, to a father originally from Shropshire and a mother from Dudley. Her father was a tile worker and her mother was a shop assistant. When she was 2, her family moved to Hellier Street, central Dudley, where she lived until 1968, apart from a period of service in the A.T.S. from 1944 to 1948. She has been a lifelong attender at 'Wesley' Methodist chapel, Wolverhampton Street in Dudley since Sunday school, and became a local preacher in 1991. She held various secretarial posts between 1939 and 1968 before working in Cyprus, Gibraltar and Belgium for the Methodist church for 10 years.

D18: Mrs Heath, b. 1911, Stafford Street, central Dudley, to a father originally from Woodside and a mother from Dudley. Her father was a brass fitter but died in action during WWI. Her mother worked part-time at a brickyard and took in cleaning to supplement her Widow's Pension. Mrs Heath occasionally attended Sunday school at 'Wesley' (United Methodist) chapel, Wolverhampton Street, but has never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. In 1935, she moved with her mother to the Wren's Nest Estate, where she has lived since. She worked at Goodwins, Dudley, packing flour until she married.

D19: Mr Hope, b. c.1910, Aldridge near Walsall. His father was a saddler's iron-monger. The family moved to Ireland before returning to Rushall. Mr Hope attended Anglican Sunday schools as a child. He moved to Hellier Street, central Dudley around 1930 after getting married. Not long afterwards he moved to the PE, where he has lived ever since. As an adult, he has been, intermittently, a regular attender at several Dudley churches including St Francis, and Vicar Street Methodist. He was a bus driver.

D20: Mrs Jeavons, b. 1933, Cedar Road, PE, Dudley, to a mother originally from Tipton and a father from Dudley. Her father was an automobile engineer, but died in 1938. Her mother worked as a personal secretary for a local brewery from 1941 to 1966. Mrs Jeavons occasionally attended Sunday school at St Francis, PE, and at Dudley Baptist church, Priory Road. She also occasionally attended St Matthew's church, Tipton, with a favourite uncle. She has lived on the PE all her life, apart from 4 years in Tipton after her marriage in 1957. She

was drawn back into regular attendance at St Francis in the mid-1960s through the involvement of her children. She has done clerical and retail work and brought up a family.

D21: Mr Lewis, b. 1932 in Gads Lane, central Dudley. His father was from Tipton and his mother from Dudley. His father worked on the railway, starting as a shunter and finishing his career as a foreman at Great Bridge station. Mr Lewis's family moved to the WNE when he was 4. Mr Lewis attended Sunday school at St Christopher's, but stopped attending any place of worship regularly in his mid teens. He later became involved in Vicar Street Young Men's Bible Class from about 1966, and remained a Methodist thereafter, becoming involved at Priory Methodist chapel. Mr Lewis worked as a driver for the Dudley gas works and then for the Council tending parks.

D22: Mrs Palmer, b. 1916, Cross Street, central Dudley. Her father unloaded canal boats. Mrs Palmer attended Sunday school at St Edmund's Dudley and remained a regular attender there throughout her life until old age and infirmity prevented her attending. As an adult, she lived in the Buffery Park area of Dudley. She worked at Goodyears for 15 years after finishing school, until she got married.

D23: Mrs Richards, b. 1941, WNE, Dudley, where she has lived all her life. Her parents were both from local families. Her father was a cook, then forced by illness into night-watchman jobs. Mrs Richards occasionally attended Sunday school at St Christopher, WNE, but was also taken by her mother to Sunday school and services at St John's Spiritualist church, Queen's Cross, Dudley, where her mother had a job caretaking. She attended St Francis church, PE, fairly regularly as a young adult until the demands of bringing up a family prevented anything but occasional attendance for special occasions. She has worked as a cashier for various shops in Dudley.

D24: Mr Simpson, b. 1923 in Handsworth, to a mother from Netherton and a father from Birmingham. His father was a polisher. Mr Simpson was brought up weekdays by his grandmother in Netherton until his father remarried and came to live in Woodside. Mr Simpson attended Sunday school in Netherton until the age of about 9, but never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult, apart from a brief spell when he attended Vicar Street Young Men's Bible Class, as agreed with his probation officer. He worked at Round Oak steelworks.

D25: Mr Smart, b. 1924, Brown Street, Kate's Hill, Dudley, to parents of local families. His father died when he was very young, and his stepfather worked in steelworks in Netherton. His family was moved to the PE c. 1932, where he has lived ever since. Mr Smart attended Sunday school at St John's Kate's Hill until his family moved to the PE, after which he never again regularly attended any place of worship. He worked at local pits before seeing active service in WWII, then worked in various labouring jobs after the War.

D25: Mrs Smart, b. 1931, Station Hill, central Dudley, to parents of local families. Before she was a year old, her family moved to the PE, where she has lived ever since. Mrs Smart attended Sunday school at St Francis and at the Baptist church on Priory Road, but has never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult.

D26: Mr Slater, b. 1926, Lower Gornal, to a mother from a Gornal family and a father from a Dudley family, but he was brought up by his grandmother in Gornal in his early childhood. His father was a kerb-layer. Mr Slater's family moved to the WNE in 1933. He attended Sunday school at St Luke's, Wellington Road, until about the age of 12. Since then he has not regularly attended any place of worship. He has worked in furnaces since leaving school.

D27: Mr Thomas, b. 1926, Bloxwich. The family moved to Netherton whilst he was still an infant, before moving to the PE in 1932. His father worked at Hingley's iron works, Netherton. Mr Thomas attended Sunday school at St Francis. As an adult he only occasionally attended any place of worship until, in later life, he became involved with local Methodism and is now a local preacher. Mr Thomas worked for the Co-op, after leaving school, then pursued a career as a travelling salesman, seeing active service during WWII.

D28: Mrs Tudor, b. 1918, Alma Place, central Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father worked for a bed manufacturer in Holly Hall. Her parents moved to the PE, but Mrs Tudor lived with her grandmother in Alma Place. She attended Sunday school at St Thomas as a child but never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. Mrs Tudor worked as a machinist at Hillman's, a Dudley glove manufacturer.

D29: Mr Williams, b. 1922, Somerset. Mr Williams moved to Warrens Hall Road, Dudley, in 1952 and pursued a career as a primary school teacher. He attended Sunday school as a child and since living in Dudley has been a regular attender at St Thomas's church.

D30: Mr Young, b. 1926, Kate's Hill, Dudley, to parents from local families. His father was a blacksmith. Mr Young's family moved to the WNE in 1937. Whilst living in Kate's Hill, he attended Sunday school at St John's church, but on moving to the WNE he stopped attending Sunday school and since then has never regularly attended any place of worship. Mr Young worked at a butcher's shop in Dudley for 26 years, before joining the Council Parks Department in 1963.

D30: Mrs Young, b. 1926, Church Street, central Dudley, to parents from local families. Her father was a boot-repairer. Her family moved to the WNE in 1935. Whilst living in Church Street she attended Sunday school at St Thomas and attended Sunday school at St Christopher after moving to the WNE. She has never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. Mrs Young worked at Grainger and Smith's tailoring factory in Dudley for about 14 years until she had her son.

RPMSI, Gornal interviewees:

G1: Mr Bailey, b. 1923, Newcastle-under-Lyme. His father was a pot-bank worker but forced by unemployment to seek work in the Black Country and found employment in factories in Wolverhampton from 1926. The family moved to Ruiton, where Mr Bailey's sister had been working in service during WWI. Mr Bailey attended Sunday school at Ruiton Congregational chapel until the age of 16. As an adult, he has never regularly attended any place of worship. He worked in hearth furniture manufacturing.

G2: Mrs Brooks, b. 1905, Gornal Wood, to parents from local families. Her father was a coal miner. She attended Sunday school at Zoar chapel, but as an adult has only attended special services, though in old age she has been attending a Ladies Class at Zoar. Mrs Brooks did clerical work for a short time then worked in finishing knitwear at home.

G2: Mr Sankey, b. 1922, Gornal Wood, to parents from local families. His father was a miner at Baggeridge colliery. He attended Sunday school at Zoar chapel, but as an

adult has only attended special services. He worked in retailing, mainly at the local Co-operative stores, eventually becoming Under-manager.

G2: Mrs Sankey, b. c.1922, Stafford. She attended Sunday school at a small Church of England mission church near Stafford and was confirmed, but has not been a regular attender at any place of worship as an adult. She moved to Gornal on marriage to Mr Sankey in 1944. Other biographical details unknown.

G3: Mr Banks, b. 1916, Brook Street, Lower Gornal, to a father from a Tipton family and a mother from a local family. His father grew fruit and sold it in streets locally. Mr Banks attended Sunday school at St James, Lower Gornal, and has remained a regular attender there throughout his life. He worked for 20 years as a surface worker at Baggeridge, then worked in a factory producing motor parts.

G4: Mr Beddoe, b. 1921, Lower Gornal, to a father from a Herefordshire family and a mother from a local family. His father was a construction foreman for Gibbons. Mr Beddoe attended Sunday school at Lake Street (Primitive) Methodist chapel, Lower Gornal, but has not regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. He worked as a draughtsman mainly locally, though he saw active service during WWII and worked abroad for a year. As an adult he lived in other parts of the Black Country for periods, as well as Gornal.

G5: Mrs Beale, b. 1920, Gornal Wood, to parents of local families. Her father was an engineer for Gibbons, always, in Mrs Beale's memory, holding a supervisory role. She attended Himley Road (Wesleyan) Methodist Sunday school and has remained a lifelong attender there. Before and after having a family she worked in secretarial jobs in Birmingham and Dudley.

G6: Mr Beech, b. 1927, Lower Gornal, to parents of local families. His father and mother were both in service to the Earl of Dudley. Mr Beech attended Sunday school at St Andrew's mission church, the Straits, Lower Gornal and then at St James, Lower Gornal. As an adult, he has never been a regular attender at any place of worship. Mr Beech worked as a long-distance lorry driver, and also part-time on the comedy circuit.

G7: Mrs Childs, b. 1915, Upper Gornal, to parents of local families. Her father was a foundry worker, then a builder. Mrs Childs attended Sunday school at Mount Zion (United Methodist) chapel, and has been a lifelong attender at one or other of the Upper Gornal Methodist chapels, as well as attending Salvation Army meetings in latter years. She worked as a sewer and weaver in various local textile factories, then in packing before becoming a home-help.

G8: Mrs Clark, b. 1913, Lower Gornal, to parents of local families, sister to Mrs Healey. Her father was a coal miner. Mrs Clark attended Sunday school at Lake Street (Primitive) Methodist chapel, and has remained an occasional attender there throughout her life.

G9: Mr Davis, b. 1917, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families, brother to Mrs Perry. His father was a bricklayer/builder. Mr Davis attended Sunday school at Robert Street Strict Baptist and Rehoboth Strict Baptist chapels, Lower Gornal. As an adult,

he briefly taught in the Baptist Sunday school, but thereafter never regularly attended any place of worship. He worked as an electrical engineer, was in the R.A.F. during WWII, and became a school teacher after the War.

G10: Mr Fletcher, b. 1938, Upper Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a lorry driver. Mr Fletcher attended Sunday school at Kent Street Methodist chapel, Upper Gornal then, from his mid-teens, also attended Lake Street Methodist chapel, Lower Gornal. Since then, he has been a regular attender at Lake Street, in recent years also attending Eve Lane Pentecostal church, Upper Gornal. Mr Fletcher worked as a mechanic up to 1965, since when he has worked in sales.

G10: Mrs Fletcher, b. c.1940, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families. Her father was a tailor then a small shopkeeper. She attended Sunday school at Lake Street Methodist chapel, but her family left Lake street in 1949 to worship at Eve Lane Pentecostal church, Upper Gornal, where she has been a regular worshipper ever since. Mrs Fletcher became a primary school teacher.

G11: Mr Garner, b. c.1930. Mr Garner was born and lived in parts of the Black Country outside Gornal or Dudley, but came to live in Sedgley in the mid-1960s and has published several collections of old photographs of the Gornal and Sedgley area.

G12: Mrs Grundy, b. 1929, Tipton. Her father was a lock-keeper. She attended Sunday school at a church in Tipton, and has been an occasional attender at St James, Lower Gornal, since moving to the village in 1951 following her marriage to a Gornal man.

G12: Mrs Healey, b. 1914, Lower Gornal, to parents of local families, sister to Mrs Clark. Her father was a coal miner. Mrs Healey attended Sunday school at St James's Anglican church, Lower Gornal, and has remained an attender there throughout her life.

G13: Mr Hayes, b. 1935, Upper Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a carpenter and joiner. Mr Hayes attended Sunday school at Kent Street Methodist chapel, Upper Gornal, and has been a regular adult attender there and, since 1970, at the new Upper Gornal Methodist chapel. Mr Hayes became a schoolteacher after taking an art degree and doing National Service, and since 1980 has been a self-employed artist and graphic designer.

G14: Miss Hopkins, b. 1915, Ruiton, to parents from local families. Her parents were hawkers of agricultural implements, and were away 6 months of the year, during which time the young Miss Hopkins lived with her aunt in Ruiton. Miss Hopkins attended Sunday school at Ruiton Congregational chapel, and became a regular adult attender there. She worked with her parents, hawking metalwares.

G15: Mr Hood, b. 1920, Ruiton, to parents from local families. His father owned and worked a small quarry in the village, employing 2 or 3 men. Mr Hood attended Sunday school at Ruiton Congregational, and has been a regular adult attender there all of his life. He inherited his father's quarry business, and saw active service during WWII.

G15: Mrs Hood, b. 1921, Ruiton, to parents from local families. Her father was an engine-winder at Baggeridge colliery, but both her parents died before she was 9, and from the age of 5 she was brought up by a paternal uncle and aunt living locally. She attended Sunday school at Ruiton Congregational, and has been a regular adult attender there all of her life.

G16: Mrs Homer, b. 1916, Buckley in Wales. Her father was a policeman after active service during WWI, but was forced by illness into several other unskilled jobs. Mrs Homer attended Sunday school at a Salvation Army hall in Buckley. She came to Gornal in 1937 to work in service in local hospitals. She has remained a lifelong member of the Salvation Army, attending and working for the local hall in Sedgley. She has worked in hospitals and factories and brought up a family.

G17: Mr Hudson, b. c.1919, Poynton, Cheshire. His mother ran away when he was just a year old and his father died when Mr Hudson was 13. He occasionally attended Sunday school, but was converted during a Cliff College mission at Chester at the age of 15 and went to Cliff College at the age of 17. He was a member of the team of Cliff missioners who came to Gornal in 1937. During the mission he met his future wife and returned after active service during WWII to marry her and live in Gornal. Since then he has been a regular attender at St Paul's Protestant church, Lower Gornal. He worked as an engineer for local firms.

G18: Mr Hughes, b. 1938, Upper Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a moulder in a foundry in Tipton. Mr Hughes attended Sunday school at Kent Street Methodist chapel, Upper Gornal. As a teenager he also occasionally attended Pentecostal meetings at Salop Street, Dudley. He has been a lifelong attender at Kent Street chapel and, since 1970, at the new Upper Gornal Methodist chapel. Mr Hughes left Gornal to take a degree in geography, but returned and became a local school teacher.

G19: Mrs Jones, b. 1941, Ruiton, to parents from local families. Her father was a carpenter, but Mrs Jones was brought up by her paternal grandmother, who lived next door. Mrs Jones attended Sunday school at Kent Street Methodist chapel, and has been a regular attender at a local Methodist chapel ever since. Before and after raising a young family, she worked in clerical positions in local retail stories, reaching a junior management position.

G20: Mrs Kenny, b. 1935, Ruiton, to parents from local families. Her father was a steelworker in Bilston. She attended Sunday school at Ruiton Congregational chapel, but never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. She worked as a shop assistant.

G21: Mr Latham, b. 1925, Lower Gornal to parents from local families. His father worked in the toolroom of the Sunbeam factory in Wolverhampton then set up his own shop selling cycles and radios in Gornal. Mr Latham attended Sunday school at Himley Road (Wesleyan), then Lake Street (Primitive) Methodist chapels. As an adult, he has been a regular attender at Lake Street all his life. He worked as an engineer for the Gornal firm of Gibbons.

G22: Mrs Mason, b. 1908, Lower Gornal to parents from local families. Her father was a carpenter. Mrs Mason attended Sunday school at Five Ways (United Methodist) chapel, Lower Gornal and has remained a regular attender there throughout her life. She worked as a sewing machinist in Dudley and raised a family.

G23: Mrs Perry, b. 1920, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families, sister to Mr Davis. Her father was a bricklayer/builder. Mrs Perry attended Sunday school at Robert Street Strict Baptist and Rehoboth Strict Baptist chapels, Lower Gornal. As an adult, she has been a regular attender at Five Ways Methodist chapel, Lower Gornal. She worked in various clerical jobs in Gornal, Dudley and Wolverhampton.

G24: Mr Picken, b. 1913, Upper Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a coal miner. Mr Picken attended Sunday school at Mount Zion (United Methodist) chapel, Upper Gornal, but never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. Mr Picken was a coal miner.

G25: Mr Raybould, b. 1916, Wombourne. His father was a bricklayer. Mr Raybould attended Sunday school at Wombourne parish church and at a Methodist chapel in Wombourne. He moved to Gornal following active service in WWII, after getting married to a Gornal woman in 1940. In Gornal he attended Lake Street Methodist chapel regularly, but not every week, having tried St James, Lower Gornal, where his wife went, and found it too high church. He worked in various factories in unskilled jobs.

G26: Mrs Scott, b. 1913, Oakywell Street, central Dudley, then lived on the PE. Her parents were both from local families. Her father was a bricklayer's labourer. She attended Sunday school at St Edmund's, Dudley and then St Francis, PE, until she was about 15. As an adult, she moved to Gornal after marrying a Gornal man and occasionally attended St James, Lower Gornal, around the demands of raising a family. She worked in local brickyards both before and after marriage and brought up a family.

G27: Mr Savage, b. 1915, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a colliery safety officer. Mr Savage attended Sunday school at St James, Lower Gornal and as an adult has been a lifelong regular attender there. Before WWII he had two clerical jobs locally, was stationed in Shropshire during the war in the pay corps, then worked as an accounts department supervisor in Ettingshall and Bilston after WWII.

G28: Mr Tranter, b. 1926, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was a miner, then a paviour for the local council. Mr Tranter attended Sunday school at Zoar (United Methodist) chapel, Gornal Wood, but never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. He worked in various outdoor unskilled jobs and saw active service at the very end of WWII.

G29: Mrs Tomlins, b. 1930, Coseley. She attended Sunday school at a Methodist chapel in Coseley, but never attended any place of worship as an adult. She came to live in Gornal on her marriage to Mr Tomlins in 1951. Other biographical details unknown.

G29: Mr Tomlins, b. 1929, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families. His father was ran a small hardware shop in Gornal, and his mother worked at Grainger and Smith's clothes manufacturer in Dudley. Mr Tomlins attended Sunday school at Robert Street Strict Baptist chapel, but never regularly attended any place of worship as an adult. He worked in a foundry for 16 years then took over his father's shop.

G30: Mrs Wesley, b. 1921, Lower Gornal, to parents from local families. Her father was a miner and her mother a brick-maker. Mrs Wesley attended Sunday school at Five Ways (United Methodist) chapel, Lower Gornal, and has been a regular attender at local Methodist chapels throughout her life. She worked at Palethorpes sausage factory as a packer, and raised a family.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire data

Copies of the questionnaire illustrated in this appendix were distributed through churches and chapels (mainly Anglican and Methodist), elderly people's clubs, local public libraries and through personal contacts. Of approximately 500 copies distributed, 133 completed questionnaires were returned. Rates of return, however, varied according to the point of distribution. Unsurprisingly, there was a disproportionate number of returns from churches and chapels and, although all copies were taken from libraries, a disappointingly low rate of return from the latter. Consequently, committed churchgoers are greatly over-represented in the sample: 92 of the 133 were members of their respective denominations or churches, including 51 confirmed Anglicans and 38 Methodist members. Furthermore, the sample included 91 women and 34 men (8 respondents did not declare their sex). Responses were coded and entered on SPSS for Windows. Analysis of the returns was executed using SPSS for Windows.

The questionnaire data needs, therefore, to be treated with some caution as a means of illuminating aspects of popular religiosity. Many of the 42 non-members, a small sample in itself, may well still represent an untypical level of associational involvement and private religious practice, and the gender imbalance needs to be kept in mind whenever findings based on the whole sample are adduced as evidence. Whenever the influence of gender and degrees of institutional commitment seemed likely to be of significance, the relevant sub-sets were isolated for independent analyses.

Countering this tendency for the un-representative returns to exaggerate the extent of popular religious practices are the intractable problems resulting from the inevitable failure of some respondents to provide complete responses to all questions. It seems reasonable to suppose, but is impossible to demonstrate, that the questionnaire will have failed to maintain the full interest of some respondents through to the final questions, so that responses to question 14, for example, on domestic religious practices, may well under-represent the extent of such practices. Such problems can only be acknowledged, but not quantified.

Please remember that all of the following questions (except Q.1) refer only to periods within the years 1914 - 1965 during which you were living in, and/or attending church in, the Gornals. Please feel free to add any comments or any examples, wherever you feel they might be relevant.

Q.1 Which of the following best describes your mother and your father? (tick as appropriate)

	Methodist Member	Regular Methodist	Occasional Methodist	Regular Anglican	Occasional Anglican	No Religion	Other (please state)
Mother							
Father							

Q.2 How important were the following factors in leading you to become an adult member or regular attender at an Anglican or Methodist church?

	Very important	Important	Less important
Adult conversion			
Denomination of spouse			
Friends' influence			
Parents' influence			
Sunday School			
Other (please state)			
Never a member or regular attender			

Q.3 When, if at all, were you confirmed in the Church of England, and/or officially recognised as a member of the Methodist church? (state year)

	Year (approx.)
Anglican confirmation	
Methodist membership	
Membership of other denomination (please state)	
None	

Q.4 Which of the following churches did you attend **regularly** (most Sundays) or **occasionally**, when you were between the ages listed? (tick for each of applicable age ranges)

R = regularly **O** = occasionally

Age:	0-15		16-21		22-35		36-50		51-65		66+	
	R	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**
Five Ways												
Himley Road												
Kent St												
Lake St												
Mount Zion												
St James's												
St Paul's												
St Peter's												
Straits Mission												
Zoar												
Church outside Gornals												
Other (please state)												
None												

Q.5 Which of the following annual services did you attend **regularly** (most years) or **occasionally**, when you were between the ages listed? (tick for each of applicable age ranges)

R = regularly **O** = occasionally

Age:	0-15		16-21		22-35		36-50		51-65		66+	
	R	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**
Ascension Day												
Ash Wednesday												
Chapel Anniversary												
Choir Sunday												
Christmas Day												
Xmas Eve (midnight)												
Covenant service												
Easter Sunday												
Good Friday												
Harvest Festival												
Ladies' Day												
Men's Sunday												
Mothering Sunday												
Patronal Festival												
Remembrance Sunday												
Sun. School Anniv'y												
Watch Night												
Whitsunday												
Other (please state)												
None												

Q.6 Which of the following services and meetings did you attend **regularly** (more often than not) or **occasionally,** when you were between the ages listed? (tick for each of applicable age ranges)

R = regularly **O** = occasionally

Age:	0-15		16-21		22-35		36-50		51-65		66+	
(A=Anglican; M=Methodist)	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**
Morning service (A or M)												
Evening service (A or M)												
Sunday Eucharist (A)												
Weekday Eucharist (A)												
Weekday Evensong (A)												
Class meeting (M)												
Sacrament (M)												
W'kday prayer meeting (M)												
W'kday preaching service (M)												
Other (please state)												
None												

Q.7 Please provide the names of any people you recall who filled one or more of the roles listed and who were particularly popular, with approximate dates for their activities if possible. Please feel free to add any comments/explanations. (A = Anglican; M = Methodist)

	Names	Approx. dates
Visiting preacher (A or M)		
Vicar (A)		
Assistant minister/curate (A)		
Lay reader (A)		
Superintendent minister (M)		
2nd/3rd minister (M)		
Local preacher (M)		
Other (please state)		

Q.8 In which of the following church-related activities were you involved when you were of the ages listed? (tick for each of applicable age ranges)

Age :	0-15	16-21	22-35	36-50	51-65	66+
Choir						
Christian Endeavour						
Girls' Class						
Men's meetings						
Mothers' Meetings						
Mutual improvement societies						
Sewing club						
Socials						
Sport						
Sunday School						
Teacher training						
Temperance bands						
Uniformed groups (e.g. Boys' Brigade)						
Wesley Guild						
Women's meetings						
Young Men's Class						
Youth club						
Other (please state)						

I'm interested to know more about your experiences of these groups. For example, what kinds of activity were you involved in, and what did you enjoy most about belonging to the group(s)? What didn't you enjoy? Can you think of any one story about your experience of the group that sticks in your mind? What happened? (please write any comments in the space below).

Q.9 Did you ever hold any of the following official positions within the Anglican (A) or Methodist (M) churches when you were of the ages listed? (tick for each of applicable age ranges)

Age:	0-21	22-35	36-50	51-65	66+
Choir-master/conductor (A or M)					
Finance committee member (A or M)					
Pianist/organist (A or M)					
Secretary (please specify) (A or M)					
Sunday school teacher (A or M)					
Youth leader (A or M)					
Treasurer (A or M)					
Altar server (A)					
Bell ringer (A)					
Church council member (A)					
Church warden (A)					
Lay reader (A)					
Ruri-decanal conference representative (A)					
Sidesman (A)					
Verger (A)					
Circuit steward (M)					
Class leader (M)					
Conference representative (M)					
District meeting representative (M)					
Local preacher (M)					
Society steward (M)					
Trustee (M)					
Other (please state)					
None					

Q.10 How interested were you (very, moderately, little) in the following levels of church life during the periods listed?

V = very **M** = moderately **L** = little

	1914-1932			1933-1950			1951-1965		
(A=Anglican; M=Methodist)	**V**	**M**	**L**	**V**	**M**	**L**	**V**	**M**	**L**
Parish church (A)									
Diocese (A)									
National church (A)									
Local church/chapel (M)									
Circuit (M)									
Connexion (M)									

Q.11 If a Methodist before 1932, how much enthusiasm did you have for the union of the different Methodist connexions, and to what extent do you consider union to have been a success?

	High	Moderate	Low
Enthusiasm for union			
Success of union			

Q.12 How important were the following factors in attracting you to your church (as opposed to other churches) during the periods listed?

V = very important **I** = important **L** = less important

	1914-32			1933-65		
	V	**I**	**L**	**V**	**I**	**L**
Commitment to social causes						
Evangelism						
Family tradition						
Fellowship (including friendship etc.)						
Music and hymns						
Near to home						
Sermon						
Style of worship						
Theology/teaching						
Other (please state)						

Q.13 How much co-operation was there between your church and churches of other denominations (as listed) during the periods listed? (please tick appropriate box for your church in left-hand column)

R = regular **S** = some **N** = none

	Your church	1914-32			1933-65		
		R	**S**	**N**	**R**	**S**	**N**
Anglican							
Methodist							
Other Free Churches							
Roman Catholic							
Primitive Methodist							
United Methodist							
Wesleyan Methodist							

Q.14 Which of the following religious activities did you **regularly** (once a week or more) or **occasionally** engage in at home when you were of the ages listed?

R = regularly **O** = occasionally

Age :	0-15		16-21		22-35		36-50		51-65		66+	
	R	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**	**R**	**O**
Bible reading												
Listening to the Bible being read												
Grace												
Family prayer												
Private prayer												
Family hymn-singing												
Reading religious newspapers/magazines												
Following religious radio and TV programmes												
Collecting money for church work												
Other (please state)												
None												

It would be very helpful if you will tell me a little about yourself. No personal details will be seen by anybody but me, nor will your name be used in connection with any responses to the questionnaire unless you so wish.

Name and address:

Sex: M/F (delete as appropriate)

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Schools/college/university attended (please provide ages between which you attended each):

Date of marriage (if applicable):
Year of separation or of being widowed (if applicable):

Addresses (street name and town/village) in the Gornals/Dudley and elsewhere at which you lived between 1914 and 1965, with approximate dates:

Jobs (including any periods of unemployment) between 1914 and 1965, with approximate dates (please provide brief details of the nature of your jobs and not just the name of your employer):

Current job:
Husband/wife's main job:

Father's main job:

Mother's main job:

Please feel free to make any additional comments on the blank page overleaf.

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HRMC: Himley Road Methodist Church safe
LSMC: Lake Street Methodist Church safe
P1: Private collection of Miss D. Clark, Dudley
P2: Private collection of Mr K. Wintle, Dudley
P3: Private collection of Mrs V. Jones
P4: Private collection of Mr M. Beardsmore, Gornal Wood
P5: Private collection of Mr and Mrs Fletcher, Lower Gornal
P6: Private collection of Mr Savage, Lower Gornal
S&GMCr1: Sedgley and Gornal Methodist Circuit safe, Summer Road Manse
S&GMCr2: Sedgley and Gornal Methodist Circuit safe, Viewfield Crescent Manse
STE: St Edmund's, Dudley, Church safe
STJEH: St James's Eve Hill, Dudley, Church safe
STJLG: St James's, Lower Gornal, Church safe
STPUG: St Peter's, Upper Gornal, Church safe
STT: St Thomas's, Dudley, Church safe
UGMC: Upper Gornal Methodist Church safe
WDRO: Worcester Diocesan Record Office, St Helen's, Worcester
WU: Wolverhampton University Dudley Campus Library
ZMC: Zoar Methodist Church safe

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Wesley (United) Methodist Chapel, Wolverhampton Street, documents relating to various Charities (1 bundle) [DALHS, N/M/Du]

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Dudley Methodist Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 4 April 1932 [P1]

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The Messenger (Gornal and Sedgley Free Church Council), 10/21, 8/34, 3/35, 11/35, 2/39, 8/45, 4/48, 9/52, 10/52, 12/52, 3/53, 7/54, 7/63, 2/64, 4/64, 5/64, 6/64, 7/64, 8/64, 9/64, 10/64, 11/64, 12/64, 1/65, 2/65, 4/65, 5/65, 9/65, 12/65, 1/66, 5/66, 7/66, 8/66, 10/66, 12/66, 2/67, 3/67, 4/67, 12/67, 4/68, 7/68, 8/68, 9/68, 10/68, 11/68, 1/69, 2/69, 3/69, 4/69, 5/69, 6/69 [various private collections]

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United Methodist Church Minutes of Conference, 1914-30

Wesleyan Conference Agenda, 1914-32

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Wesleyan Minutes of Conference, 1914-1932

Annual Reports of the West Midlands Federation of Evangelical Free Church Councils, 1903-06 [BPU, B10.21]

West Midlands Federation of Evangelical Free Church Councils Minute Book, 1910-1913 [BPU, ZZ 65B]

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Sedgley Urban District Council Minutes, 1909-17 [DALHS]

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Interviews from other oral history archives:

A. Lancaster Oral History Archive:

Mr M13B, born 1927, Horwick, son of a fitter

Mr B3B, born 1915, Preston, son of a plumber

Mr B4B, born 1920, Bolton (then Barrow), son of a merchant seaman

Mr B8P, born 1896, Preston, son of a mule spinner

Mr C1P, born 1884, Preston, son of a railway labourer

Mr D2P, born 1910, son of a soldier then clerk

Mr F2L, born 1946, Lancaster, son of a butcher

Mr G3L, born 1937, Lancaster, son of a boilerman

Mr K1B, born 1921, Barrow, son of a joiner

Mr K2P, born 1930, Preston, son of a docker

Mr L5B, born 1950, Barrow, son of a blast furnace-man

Mr M10L, born 1948, Lancaster, son of a factory worker

Mr M7P, born 1922, Co. Mayo, son of a smallholder

Mr M8L, born 1926, Lancaster, son of a labourer

Mr P5B, born 1950, Barrow, son of a fitter

Mr P6B, born 1909, Barrow, son of a joiner

Mr R1P, born 1944, Preston, son of a shop assistant

Mr R3P, born 1931, Preston, son of a church caretaker

Mr S9P, born 1925, Preston, son of a timber merchant

Mr T5B, born 1923, Barrow, son of a street vendor

Mr W5L, born 1940, Lancaster, son of a fishmonger

Mr W6L, born 1931, Lancaster, son of a labourer

Mr W7B, born 1945, Barrow, son of a machinist

Mr W7P, born 1940, Preston, son of a soldier

Mrs A1P, born 1910, Preston, daughter of a patten-maker

Mrs A2P, born 1900, Preston, daughter of a coachman

Mrs A3L, born 1944, Cockerham, daughter of a farmer

Mrs A4L, born 1932, Lancaster, daughter of a farmworker

Mrs B1P, born 1900, Preston, daughter of a moulder

Mrs B11P, born 1936, Preston, daughter of a riveter

Mrs B2B, born 1931, Barrow, daughter of a Vickers worker

Mrs B2P, born 1916, Preston, daughter of a railway labourer

Mrs B3B, born 1928, Barrow, daughter of a shipyard worker

Mrs C7L, born 1926, Lancaster, daughter of a weaver

Mrs D1P, born 1908, Preston, daughter of a labourer

Mrs F1L, born 1921, Lancaster, daughter of a miner

Mrs G5P, born 1958, Preston, daughter of a labourer

Mrs G7P, born 1944, Preston, daughter of a Co-op assistant

Mrs H2P, born 1898, Preston, daughter of a spinner

Mrs H3P, born 1931, Preston, daughter of a labourer

Mrs H6B, born 1948, Barrow, daughter of a joiner

Mrs H8P, born 1903, Preston, daughter of a clogger

Mrs J1B, born 1932, Barrow, daughter of a railway labourer

Mrs K2P, born 1936, Preston, daughter of a docker

Mrs L3B, born 1920, Flookborough, father unemployed, later a storeman at Vickers

Mrs L3L, born 1947, Lancaster, father unknown

Mrs L3P, born 1922, Preston, father unknown

Mrs M12B, born 1936, Barrow, daughter of a ironworks shunter

Mrs O1B, born 1916, Barrow, daughter of a steel dresser

Mrs P3L, born 1948, Lancaster, daughter of a labourer

Mrs P5B, born 1950, Barrow, daughter of a borer

Mrs R1P, born 1945, Preston, daughter of a riveter

Mrs R4B, born 1936, Barrow, daughter of a draughtsman

Mrs S3B, born 1927, Barrow, daughter of an electrician's mate

Mrs T2L, born 1932, Lancaster, father deceased

Mrs T4B, born 1948, Barrow, daughter of a shipwright

Mrs W5B, born 1933, Barrow, daughter of a fitter

Mrs W5L, born 1943, Lancaster, father unknown

Mrs W6B, born 1936, Barrow, daughter of a grocer

Mrs Y1L, born 1927, Lancaster, daughter of an edge-minder

B. Bristol Oral History Archive

R003, male, born 1885, Bristol, son of a labourer

R004, female, born 1897, Bristol, daughter of a newsagent

R005, male, born 1902, Bristol, son of an engineer

R007, male, born 1903, Bristol, son of a blacksmith

R008, male, born 1898, Bristol, son of a foundry worker

R009, male, born 1899, Bristol, son of a dock labourer

R021, female, born 1904, daughter of a dockyard worker

R023, male, born 1912, son of a docker

R024, female, born 1899, daughter of a factory worker

R030, female, born 1898, daughter of a lighter man

R032, male, born 1890, son of a docker

R038, male, born 1909, son of a quarry worker

R041, female, born 1899, daughter of a factory worker

R042, female, born 1909, daughter of a salesman

R043, male, born 1914, son of an engineer

R047, male, born 1906, son of a candlemaker

R061, female, born 1910, daughter of a general labourer

R063, male, born 1905, son of a cabinet maker

R065, male, born 1922, son of a docker

R066, male, born 1898, son of a tramway worker

<u>Conversations and correspondence between the author and former ministers of Dudley and Gornal</u>

Butler, John (former incumbent at St Peter's, Upper Gornal), letter received January 1997

Hayward, Alan (former curate of St Christopher's, Wren's Nest Estate), telephone conversation 9 January 1997, unrecorded

Llewellyn, David (former curate of St Christopher's, Wren's Nest Estate), letter received January 1997

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554, 'What the People Think: article for *News Chronicle*, 6 February 1941 by Tom Harrison', 24 January 1941

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755, 'Report on Faith in Parliament: Attitudes to the Rejection of the Opening of Sunday Theatres by Parliament', 24 June 1941

975, 'Report on Superstition', 24 November 1941

980, 'Armistice Day 1941', 14 November 1941

1200, 'Religion', 6 April 1942

1263, 'Belief in the Supernatural', 16 May 1942

1268, 'The Traditional English Sunday', 20 May 1942

1294,'The Unknown', June 1942 [contains copy of 'The Supernatural', *Mass Observation Bulletin*, New Series, 5 January 1947]

1525, 'Fifth Report on Reconstruction: Religion and the Future', 1 December 1942

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1572, 'Religious Arguments Today', 25 January 1943

1612, 'Faith and Fear in Post-War Britain', 15 February 1943

1994, 'Interim Report on Religious Instruction in Schools', 5 January 1944

2112, 'Superstition', 7 June 1944

2227, 'Post-Easter-Peace Questionnaire', 3 April 1945

2235, 'Religious Beliefs in a London Borough', April 1945

2263, 'Report on Victory in Europe', June 1945

2274, 'Religious Attitudes in a London Borough', August 1945

2284, 'Half-Way Thinking', September 1945

2387, 'Attitudes to the Salvation Army', May 1946

2424B, 'Incomplete internal Report on Spiritualism and the Supernatural', September 1946

2461A, 'Superstition', February 1947

2475, 'Faith and Fear in Post-War Britain', May 1947

2498, 'Sunday School and Church Attendance', June 1947

2556, 'Why I don't go to church', January 1948

3027, no title, August 1948 [published in *Daily Graphic* 10 and 11 August 1948]

3049, no title, October 1948 [published as 'Are The Churches doing their Job?', *News Review*, 23 October 1947; 'Who Goes to Worship?', *News Review*, 30 October 1947; and 'Has the Church of England Had Its Day?', *News Review*, 6 November 1947]

3063A, 'The Church and You', November 1948 [published in the *Daily Graphic*, 10 and 11 August 1948]

3068, 'A Report on Contemporary Churchgoers', December 1948 [published as 'People Who Come to Church', *British Weekly*, 6 January 1949]

3068, 'Why Church', December 1948 [published as 'Why Church', *British Weekly*, 13 January 1949]

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3068, 'Choice of Church', December 1948 [published as 'The Church You Choose', *British Weekly*, 27 January 1949]

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C. Mass Observation Day Surveys:

DS271, Day Survey for 12 August 1937

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